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## NOTES AND QUERIES

Extra Number—No. 16.



# THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF ISRAEL

R. POTTER (1744-1826) - - - - *By Himself*

WILLIAM ABBATT

410 EAST 32D STREET,

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NEW YORK

1911

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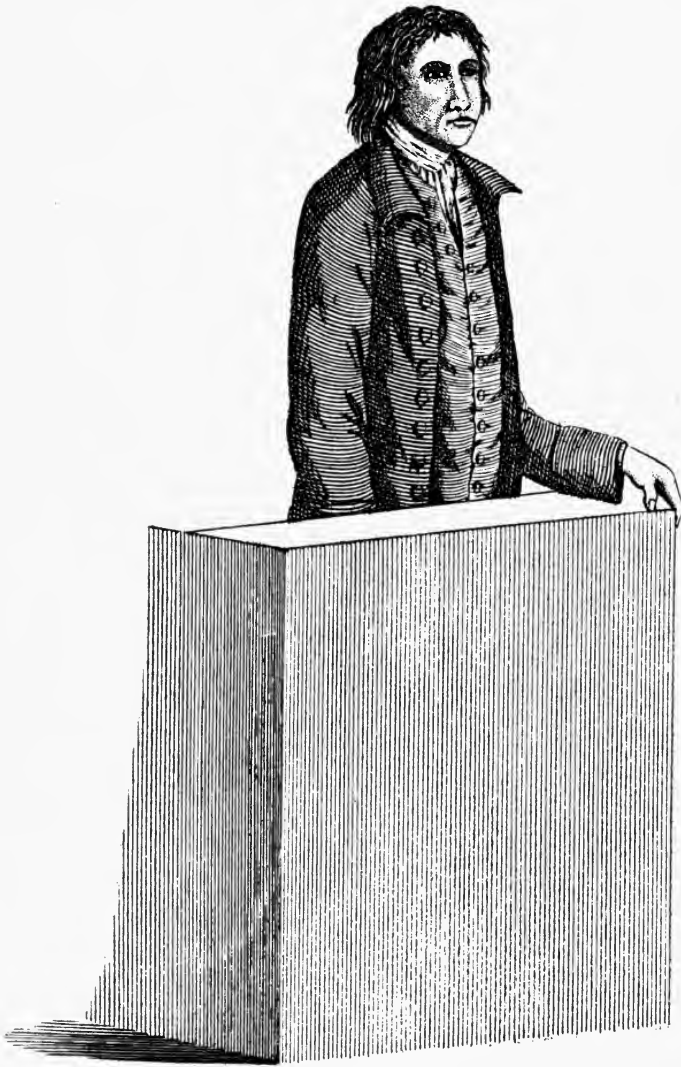
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*Lond Mag March 1777*



*JAMES AITKEN.*  
*Alias John the Painter.*

*To accompany Extra Number 15 of the Magazine of History with Notes and Queries.*

LIFE AND ADVENTURES  
OF  
ISRAEL RALPH POTTER  
(1744-1826)

PROVIDENCE  
Printed by J. Howard for I. R. Potter, 1824

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NEW YORK  
Reprinted  
WILLIAM ABBATT  
1911

(Being Extra No. 16 of THE MAGAZINE OF HISTORY WITH NOTES AND QUERIES.)

DISTRICT OF RHODE ISLAND,

*To Wit:*

Be it remembered, that on the thirteenth day of January, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-four and in the forty-eighth year of the Independence of the United States of America, Henry Trumbull of said district deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof he claims as author, in the following words to wit:

LIFE  
AND  
REMARKABLE ADVENTURES  
OF  
ISRAEL R. POTTER  
(A Native of Cranston, Rhode Island)  
WHO WAS A SOLDIER IN THE

AMERICAN REVOLUTION

And took a distinguished part in the Battle of Bunker Hill (in which he received three wounds), after which he was taken Prisoner by the British, conveyed to England, where for 30 years he obtained a livelihood for himself and family by crying, "Old Chairs to Mend," through the Streets of London. In May last, by the assistance of the American Consul, he succeeded (in the 79th year of his age) in obtaining a passage to his native country, after an absence of 48 years.

PROVIDENCE

Printed by J. HOWARD, for I. R. POTTER, 1824

In conformity to an Act of Congress, entitled "An Act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books to the author and proprietors of such copies, during the time therein mentioned," and also to an act entitled, "An Act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books to the author and proprietors of such copies, during the time therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the Art of designing, engraving, and etching, historical, and other prints."

Witness:

BENJAMIN COWELL,  
Clerk of the Rhode Island District.

LIFE  
AND  
REMARKABLE ADVENTURES  
OF  
**ISRAEL R. POTTER,**  
(A NATIVE OF CRANSTON, RHODE-ISLAND.)  
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PROVIDENCE:  
Printed by J. HOWARD, for I. R. POTTER—1824.



## EDITOR'S PREFACE

The life story of Israel Potter is one of the strangest ever made known—and its inherent interest is such that when first printed it awoke so much attention as to be hawked by peddlers throughout New England. The unfortunate author, however, did not live long enough to reap much benefit from its sale, dying within two years of his return to his native land after fifty years' exile.

His story is a valuable historical item, and the only one of the kind. Other prisoners' narratives are confined to their experiences while in captivity: his is one of life in London, after a very brief imprisonment, from which he escapes after a series of adventures worthy of Vidocq or of Sherlock Holmes.

His account of visiting the fifteen American prisoners in a London jail is peculiarly remarkable, as the only mention of any such being confined there. Portsmouth or other seaports were the usual places of imprisonment. (Dartmoor Prison was not opened until 1809.) Who and whence were these unhappy men? We have had search made of official records in London, by an expert, without obtaining the slightest clue to their identity. Sometime between 1775 and 1783, somewhere in the vast wilderness of London fifteen American prisoners lived—how long—and died—when and how, if not fortunately exchanged (as few were)?

His story of half a century's life in London helps us to see how the ranks of the British army were kept full. When the utmost efforts of industrious men were insufficient to enable them to save a penny, and many actually died of hunger, small wonder that the certainty of food, clothing, shelter, and pay, even as small as was that of the private soldier, attracted the thousands who were to

follow the drumbeat round the world. Can a terser, more emphatic picture of the poverty of the London poor be found than in Potter's brief statement that within a month after Waterloo was fought, some of the very soldiers who had helped win it, and been discharged on the return to England, were trying to live by crying "old chairs to mend" through London's streets, where he himself could barely make a shilling a day?

It is due to the memory of the brave man who perhaps might have attained prominence in his native land had he been able to return there under Franklin's plan, that the extraordinary record of his life and sufferings should be again published after an oblivion of eighty-seven years. We have endeavoured to ascertain the history of his son Thomas, who is supposed to have survived him, as he was but about ten years old in 1826; but have signally failed: a matter of real regret, for we would fain have recorded some particulars of one whose originality and courage as a child secured eventually his father's return to his birthplace, and the publication of the story of his life.



LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF  
ISRAEL R. POTTER

**I** WAS born of reputable parents in the town of Cranston, State of Rhode Island, August 1st, 1744.

I continued with my parents there in the full enjoyment of parental affection and indulgence until I arrived at the age of eighteen, when, having formed an acquaintance with the daughter of a Mr. Richard Gardner, a near neighbour, for whom (in the opinion of my friends) entertaining too great a degree of partiality, I was reprimanded and threatened by them with more severe punishment if my visits were not discontinued. Disappointed in my intentions of forming an union (when of suitable age) with one whom I really loved, I deemed the conduct of my parents in this respect unreasonable and oppressive, and formed the determination to leave them for the purpose of seeking another home and other friends.

It was on Sunday, while the family were at meeting, that I packed up as many articles of my clothing as could be contained in a pocket handkerchief, which, with a small quantity of provisions, I conveyed to and secreted in a piece of woods in the rear of my father's house. I then returned and continued in the house until about nine in the evening, when, with the pretence of retiring to bed, I passed into a back room and from thence out of a back door, and hastened to the spot where I had deposited my cloathes, &c. It was a warm summer's night, and that I might be enabled to travel with the more facility the succeeding day I lay down at

the foot of a tree and reposed myself until about four in the morning, when I arose and commenced my journey, travelling westward, with an intention of reaching, if possible, the new countries which I had heard highly spoken of as affording excellent prospects for industrious and enterprising young men. To evade the pursuit of my friends, by whom I knew I should be early missed and diligently sought for, I confined my travel to the woods and shunned the public roads, until I had reached the distance of about twelve miles from my father's house.

At noon the succeeding day I reached Hartford in Connecticut, and applied to a farmer in that town for work, and for whom I agreed to labour for one month for the sum of six dollars. Having completed my month's work to the satisfaction of my employer, I received my money and started from Hartford for Otter Creek;<sup>1</sup> but when I reached Springfield I met with a man bound to the Cahos<sup>2</sup> country, and who offered me four dollars to accompany him, of which offer I accepted, and the next morning we left Springfield and in a canoe ascended Connecticut river, and in about two weeks, after much hard labour in paddling and poling the boat against the current, we reached Lebanon, N. H., the place of our destination. It was with some difficulty and not until I had procured a writ by the assistance of a respectable innkeeper in Lebanon, by the name of Hill,<sup>3</sup> that I obtained from my last employer the four dollars which he had agreed to pay me for my services.

From Lebanon I crossed the river to New Hartford,<sup>4</sup> where I bargained with a Mr. Brink of that town for two hundred acres of new land lying in New Hampshire, and for which I was to labour for him four months. As this may appear to some a small consideration for so great a number of acres of land, it may be well here to acquaint the reader with the situation of the country in that quarter at that early period of its settlement; which was an almost

<sup>1</sup> Vermont.

<sup>2</sup> Coos County, N. H.

<sup>3</sup> This was Charles Hill.

<sup>4</sup> Then in New York State.

impenetrable wilderness, containing but few civilized inhabitants, far distantly situated from each other and from any considerable settlement, and whose temporary habitations with a few exceptions were constructed of logs in their natural state. The woods abounded with wild beasts of almost every description peculiar to this country, nor were the few inhabitants at that time free from serious apprehension of being at some unguarded moment suddenly attacked and destroyed, or conveyed into captivity by the savages, who from the commencement of the French war had improved every favourable opportunity to cut off the defenseless inhabitants of the frontier towns.

After the expiration of my four months' labour, the person who had promised me a deed of two hundred acres of land therefor having refused to fulfill his engagements, I was obliged to engage with a party of his Majesty's surveyors at fifteen shillings per month, as an assistant chain bearer, to survey the wild, unsettled lands bordering on the Connecticut river to its source. It was in the winter season, and the snow so deep that it was impossible to travel without snow-shoes. At the close of each day we enkindled a fire, cooked our victuals, and erected with the branches of hemlock a temporary hut which served us as a shelter for the night. The surveyors having completed their business returned to Lebanon, after an absence of about two months. Receiving my wages, I purchased a fowling-piece and ammunition therewith, and for the four succeeding months devoted my time in hunting deer, beavers, etc., in which I was very successful; as in the four months I obtained as many skins of these animals as produced me forty dollars. With my money I purchased of a Mr. John Marsh a hundred acres of new land lying on Water Queechy \* river (so called), about five miles from Hartford, N. Y. On this land I went immediately to work, erected a small log hut thereon, and in two summers, without any assistance, cleared up thirty acres fit

\* Now called Otter Queechy.

for sowing. In the winter seasons I employed my time in hunting and entrapping such animals whose hides and furs were esteemed of the most value. I remained in possession of my land two years, and then disposed of it to the same person of whom I purchased it, at the advanced price of two hundred dollars, and then conveyed my skins and furs which I had collected the two preceding winters to No. 4 (now Charlestown, N. H.), where I exchanged them for Indian blankets, wampeag<sup>5</sup> and such other articles as I could conveniently convey on a hand-sled, and with which I started for Canada, to barter with the Indians for furs.

This proved a very profitable trip, as I very soon disposed of every article at an advance of more than two hundred per cent. and received payment in furs at a reduced price, and for which I received in No. 4 two hundred dollars cash. With this money, together with what I was before in possession of, I now set out for home, once more to visit my parents after an absence of two years and nine months, in which time my friends had not been enabled to receive any correct information of me. On my arrival, so greatly affected were my parents at the presence of a son whom they had considered dead, that it was some time before either could become sufficiently composed to listen to or to request me to furnish them with an account of my travels.

Soon after my return, as some atonement for the anxiety which I had caused my parents, I presented them with most of the money that I had earned in my absence, and formed the determination that I would remain with them contented at home, in consequence of a conclusion, from the welcome reception that I met with, that they had repented of their opposition and had become reconciled to my intended union. But in this I soon found that I was mistaken—for although overjoyed to see me alive whom they had supposed really dead, no sooner did they find that my long absence had rather increased than diminished my attachment for their

<sup>5</sup> Wampum.

neighbour's daughter, than their resentment and opposition appeared to increase in proportion; in consequence of which I formed the determination again to quit them, and try my fortune at sea, as I had now arrived at an age in which I had an unquestionable right to think and act for myself.

After remaining at home one month I applied for and procured a berth at Providence, on board the sloop —, Captain Fuller, bound to Grenada. Having completed her loading (which consisted of stone lime, hoops, staves, etc.), we set sail with a favourable wind, and nothing worthy of note occurred until the fifteenth day from that on which we left Providence, when the sloop was discovered to be on fire by a smoke issuing from her hold. The hatches were immediately raised, but as it was discovered that the fire was caused by water communicating with the lime, it was deemed useless to make any attempts to extinguish it. Orders were immediately thereupon given by the captain to hoist out the long boat, which was found in such a leaky condition as to require constant bailing to keep her afloat. We had only time to put on board a small quantity of bread, a firkin of butter and a ten-gallon keg of water, when we embarked, eight in number, to trust ourselves to the mercy of the waves, in a leaky boat and many leagues from land. As our provision was but small in quantity, and it being uncertain how long we might remain in our perilous position, it was proposed by the captain soon after leaving the sloop that we should put ourselves on an allowance of one biscuit and half a pint of water per day for each man—which was readily agreed to by all on board. In ten minutes after leaving the sloop she was in a complete blaze and presented an awful spectacle. With a piece of the flying-jib, which had been fortunately thrown into the boat, we made shift to erect a sail, and proceeded in a southeast direction, in hopes to reach the Spanish Main, if not so fortunate as to fall in with some vessel in our course—which by the interposition of a kind Providence in our favour, actually took

place the second day after leaving the sloop. We were discovered and picked up by a Dutch ship bound from Eustatia to Holland, and from the captain and crew met with a humane reception and were supplied with every necessary that the ship afforded. We continued on board one week, when we fell in with an American sloop bound from Piscataqua to Antigua, which received us all on board and conveyed us in safety to the port of her destination. At Antigua I got a berth on board an American brig bound to Porto Rico and from thence to Eustatia. At Eustatia I received my discharge, and entered on board a ship belonging to Nantucket and bound on a whaling voyage, which proved an uncommonly short and successful one. We returned to Nantucket full of oil after an absence of the ship from that port of only sixteen months. After my discharge I continued about one month on the island, and then took passage for Providence, and from thence to Cranston, once more to visit my friends, with whom I continued three weeks and then returned to Nantucket. From Nantucket I made another whaling voyage to the South Seas, and after an absence of three years (in which time I experienced almost all the hardships and deprivations peculiar to Whalemen in long voyages) I succeeded by the blessing of Providence in reaching once more my native home, perfectly sick of the sea and willing to return to the bush and exchange a mariner's life for one less hazardous and fatiguing.

I remained with my friends at Cranston a few weeks, and then hired myself to a Mr. James Waterman of Coventry for twelve months, to work at farming. This was in the year 1774, and I continued with him about six months, when the difficulties which had for some time prevailed between the Americans and Britons had now arrived at that crisis as to render it certain that hostilities would soon commence in good earnest between the two nations; in consequence of which the Americans at this period began to prepare themselves for the event. Companies were formed in several

of the towns in New England, who received the appellation of "Minute Men," and who were to hold themselves in readiness to obey the first summons of their officers to march at a moment's notice. A company of this kind was formed in Coventry, into which I enlisted, and to the command of which Edmund Johnston \* of Coventry was appointed.

It was on a Sabbath morning that news was received of the destruction of the provincial stores at Concord, and of the massacre of our countrymen at Lexington by a detached party of the British troops from Boston; and I immediately thereupon received a summons from the captain to be prepared to march with the company early the morning ensuing—and although I felt not less willing to obey the call of my country at a minute's notice and to face her foes than did the gallant Putnam, yet the nature of the summons did not render it necessary for me, like him, to quit my plough in the field, as having the day previous commenced the ploughing a field of ten or twelve acres, that I might not leave my work half done, I improved the Sabbath to complete it.

By the break of day Monday morning I swung my knapsack, shouldered my musket, and with the company commenced my march with a quick step for Charlestown, where we arrived before sunset and remained encamped in the vicinity until about noon of the 16th of June; when, having been previously joined by the remainder of the regiment from Rhode Island to which our company was attached, we received orders to proceed and join a detachment of about a thousand American troops which had that morning taken possession of Bunker Hill, and which we had orders immediately to fortify in the best manner that circumstances would admit of. We laboured all night without cessation and with very little refreshment, and by the dawn of day succeeded in throwing

\* Edmund Johnston of Coventry was captain of the Coventry company in the Kent County regiment of militia, of which John Waterman was colonel, in August, 1774.

Potter was in Colonel Varnum's regiment, the Rhode Island.

up a redoubt of eight or nine rods square. As soon as our works were discovered by the British in the morning they commenced a heavy fire upon us, which was supported by a fort on Copp's Hill. We, however (under the command of the intrepid Putnam), continued to labour like beavers until our breastwork was completed.

About noon a number of the enemy's boats and barges, filled with troops, landed at Charlestown and commenced a deliberate march to attack us. We were now harangued by General Putnam, who reminded us that exhausted as we were by our incessant labour through the preceding night, the most important part of our duty was yet to be performed, and that much would be expected from so great a number of excellent marksmen. He charged us to be cool and to reserve our fire until the enemy approached so near as to enable us to see the whites of their eyes. When within about ten rods of our works, we gave them the contents of our muskets, and which were aimed with so good effect as soon to cause them to turn their backs and retreat with a much quicker step than with what they approached us. We were now again harangued by "old General Put," as he was termed, and requested by him to aim at the officers, should the enemy renew the attack—which they did in a few moments, with a reinforcement. Their approach was with a slow step, which gave us an excellent opportunity to obey the commands of our General in bringing down their officers. I feel but little disposed to boast of my own performance on this occasion, and will only say that after devoting so many months in hunting the wild animals of the wilderness while an inhabitant of New Hampshire, the reader will not suppose me a bad or inexperienced marksman; and that such were the fair shots which the epauletted redcoats presented in the two attacks, that every shot which they received from me I am confident on another occasion would have produced me a deerskin.

So warm was the reception which the enemy met with in their second attack that they again found it necessary to retreat; but



soon after receiving a fresh reinforcement a third assault was made, in which, in consequence of our ammunition failing, they too well succeeded. A close and bloody engagement now ensued. To fight our way through a very considerable body of the enemy, with clubbed muskets (for there were not one in twenty of us provided with bayonets), was now the only means left us to escape. The conflict, which was a sharp and severe one, is still fresh in my memory, and cannot be forgotten by me while the scars of the wounds which I then received remain to remind me of it. Fortunately for me, at this critical moment I was armed with a cutlass, which, although without an edge and much rust-eaten, I found of infinite more service to me than my musket. In one case I am certain it was the means of saving my life: a blow with a cutlass was aimed at my head by a British officer, which I parried, and received only a slight cut with the point on my right arm near the elbow, which I was then unconscious of; but this slight wound cost my antagonist at the moment a much more serious one, which effectually *dis-armed* him—for with one well-directed stroke I deprived him of the power of very soon again measuring swords with “a Yankee rebel.”

We finally, however, should have been mostly cut off and compelled to yield to a superiour and better-equipped force, had not a body of three or four hundred Connecticut men formed a temporary breastwork with rails, &c., and by which means [they] held the enemy at bay until our main body had time to ascend the heights and retreat across the Neck. In this retreat I was less fortunate than many of my comrades: I received two musket-ball wounds, one in my hip and the other near the ancle of my left leg. I succeeded, however, without any assistance, in reaching Prospect Hill, where the main body of the Americans had made a stand and commenced fortifying. From thence I was soon after conveyed to the hospital in Cambridge, where my wounds were dressed and the bullet extracted from my hip by one of the surgeons. The

house was nearly filled with the poor fellows who, like myself, had received wounds in the late engagement, and presented a melancholy spectacle.

Bunker Hill fight proved a sore thing for the British, and will, I doubt not, be long remembered by them. While in London I heard it frequently spoken of by many who had taken an active part therein, some of whom were pensioners and bore indelible proofs of American bravery. By them the Yankees by whom they were opposed were not unfrequently represented as a set of infuriated beings whom nothing could daunt or intimidate—and who, after their ammunition failed, disputed the ground inch by inch for a full hour, with clubbed muskets, rusty swords, pitchforks, and billets of wood, against the British bayonets.

I suffered much pain from the wound which I received in my ankle; the bone was badly fractured and several pieces were extracted by the surgeon, and it was six weeks before I was sufficiently recovered to be able to join my regiment quartered on Prospect Hill, where they had thrown up entrenchments within the distance of little more than a mile of the enemy's camp, which was in full view, they having entrenched themselves on Bunker Hill after the engagement.

On the 3rd of July, to the great satisfaction of the Americans, General Washington arrived from the South to take command. I was then confined in the hospital, but as far as my observation could extend, he met with a joyful reception, and his arrival was welcomed by every one throughout the camp. The troops had long been waiting with impatience for his arrival, as being nearly destitute of ammunition and the British receiving reinforcements daily, their prospects began to wear a gloomy aspect.

The British quartered in Boston began soon to suffer much from the scarcity of provisions; and General Washington took every

precaution to prevent their gaining a supply. From the country all supplies could easily be cut off, and to prevent their receiving any from Tories and other disaffected persons by water, the General found it necessary to equip two or three armed vessels to intercept them. Among these was the brigantine *Washington*, of ten guns, commanded by Captain Martindale.<sup>6</sup> As seamen at this time could not easily be obtained, as most of them had enlisted in the land service, permission was given to any of the soldiers who should be pleased to accept of the offer, to man these vessels; consequently myself and several others of the same regiment went on board the *Washington*, then lying at Plymouth, for a cruize.

We set sail about the 8th of December, but had been out but three days when we were captured by the enemy's ship *Foy*, of twenty guns, who took us all out and put a prize crew on board the *Washington*. The *Foy* proceeded with us immediately to Boston bay, where we were put on board the British frigate *Tartar*, and orders given to convey us to England.

When two or three days out I projected a scheme (with the assistance of my fellow-prisoners, seventy-two in number) to take the ship; in which we should undoubtedly have succeeded, as we had a number of resolute fellows on board, had it not been for the treachery of a renegade Englishman who betrayed us. As I was pointed out by this fellow as the principal in the plot, I was ordered in irons by the officers of the *Tartar*, and in which situation I remained until the arrival of the ship at Portsmouth (England), when I was brought on deck and closely examined; but protesting my innocence, and, what was very fortunate for me, in the course of their examination, the person by whom I had been betrayed having been proved a British deserter, his story was discredited and I was relieved of my irons.

<sup>6</sup> Captain Sion Martindale (see Cowell's "Spirit of '76"). Her crew was seventy-two men. She was fitted out at Plymouth. Captain M. was a captain in Col. Thomas Church's R. I. regiment.

The prisoners were now all thoroughly cleansed and conveyed to the marine hospital on shore, where many of us took the small-pox the natural way, from some whom we found in the hospital affected with that disease, and which proved fatal to nearly one-half our number. From the hospital those of us who survived were conveyed to Spithead and put on board a guardship, and where I had been confined with my fellow-prisoners about a month when I was ordered into the boat to assist the bargemen (in consequence of the absence of one of their gang) in rowing the lieutenant on shore. As soon as we reached the shore and the officer landed, it was proposed by some of the boat's crew to resort for a few moments to an ale-house in the vicinity to treat themselves to a few pots of beer; which being agreed to by all, I thought this a favourable opportunity, and the only one that might present, to escape from my floating prison, and felt determined not to let it pass unimproved. Accordingly, as the boat's crew were about to enter the house I expressed a necessity of my separating from them a few moments; to which they, not suspecting any design, readily assented. As soon as I saw them all snugly in and the door closed, I gave speed to my legs, and ran, as I then concluded, about four miles without once halting. I steered my course toward London, as when there, by mingling with the crowd, I thought it probable that I should be least suspected.

When I had reached the distance of about ten miles from where I quit the bargemen, and [was] beginning to think myself in little danger of apprehension should any of them be sent by the lieutenant in pursuit of me, as I was leisurely passing a public house I was noticed and hailed by a naval officer at the door with "Ahoy, what ship?" "No ship," was my reply, on which he ordered me to stop, but of which I took no other notice than to observe to him that if he would attend to his own business I would proceed quietly about mine. This rather increasing than diminishing his suspicions that I was a deserter, garbed as I was, he gave chase. Find-

ing myself closely pursued, and unwilling again to be made a prisoner of if it was possible to escape, I had once more to trust to my legs—and should have again succeeded had not the officer, on finding himself likely to be distanced, set up a cry of “Stop thief!” This brought numbers out of their houses and workshops who, joining in the pursuit, succeeded after a chase of nearly a mile, in overhauling me.

Finding myself once more in their power, and [being] a perfect stranger to the country, I deemed it vain to attempt to deceive them with a lie, and therefore made a voluntary confession to the officer that I was a prisoner of war, and related to him in what manner I had that morning made my escape. By the officer I was conveyed back to the inn, and left in custody of two soldiers; the former (previous to retiring) observing to the landlord that, believing me to be a true-blooded Yankee [he] requested him to supply me at his expense with as much liquor as I should call for.

The house was thronged early in the evening by many of the “good and faithful subjects of King George,” who had assembled to take a peep at the “Yankee rebel,” as they termed me, who had so recently taken an active part in the rebellious war then raging in His Majesty’s American provinces; while others came apparently to gratify a curiosity in viewing for the first time an “American Yankee,” whom they had been taught to believe a kind of non-descripts—beings of much less refinement than the ancient Britons, and possessing little more humanity than the Buccaneers.

As for myself, I thought it best not to be reserved, but to reply readily to all their inquiries; for while my mind was wholly employed in devising a plan to escape from the custody of my keepers, so far from manifesting a disposition to resent any of the insults offered me or my country, I feigned myself not a little pleased with their observations, and in no way dissatisfied with my situation. As the officer had left orders with the landlord to supply

me with as much liquor as I should be pleased to call for, I felt determined to make my keepers merry at his expense if possible, as the best means that I could adopt to effect my escape.

The loyal group having attempted in vain to irritate me by their mean and ungenerous reflections, by one who observed that he had frequently heard it mentioned that the Yankees were extraordinary dancers, it was proposed that I should entertain the company with a jig; to which I expressed a willingness to assent, with much feigned satisfaction, if a fiddler could be procured. Fortunately for them there was one residing in the neighbourhood, who was soon introduced, when I was obliged (although much against my own inclination) to take the floor—with the full determination, however, that if John Bull was to be thus diverted at the expense of an unfortunate prisoner of war, Uncle Jonathan should come in for his part of the sport before morning by showing them a few *Yankee steps* which they then little dreamed of.

By my performances they were soon satisfied that in this kind of exercise I should suffer but little in competition with the most nimble-footed Briton among them; nor would they release me until I had danced myself into a state of perfect perspiration—which, however, so far from being any disadvantage to me, I considered all in favour of my projected plan to escape, for while I was pleased to see the flowing bowl passing merrily about and not unfrequently brought in contact with the lips of my two keepers, the state of perspiration that I was in prevented its producing on me any intoxicating effects.

The evening having become now far spent and the company mostly retiring, my keepers, who (to use a sailor's phrase), I was happy to discover "half-seas over," having, much to my dissatisfaction, furnished me with a pair of handcuffs, spread a blanket by the side of their beds, on which I was to repose for the night. I feigned myself very grateful to them for having humanely fur-

nished me with so comfortable a bed, and on which I stretched myself with much apparent unconcern and remained quiet about one hour, when I was sure that the family had all retired to bed.

The important moment had now arrived in which I was resolved to carry my premeditated plan into execution or die in the attempt—for certain I was that if I let this opportunity pass unimproved I might have cause to regret it when it was too late; that I should most assuredly be conveyed early in the morning back to the floating prison from which I had so recently escaped, and where I might possibly remain confined until America should obtain her independence or the difficulties between Great Britain and her American provinces were adjusted. Yet, should I in any attempt to escape meet with more opposition from my keepers than what I had calculated from their apparent state of inebriety, the contest I well knew would be very unequal—they were two full-grown, stout men, with whom (if they were assisted by no others) I should have to contend handcuffed! But after mature deliberation I resolved that, however hazardous the attempt, it should be made, and that immediately.

After remaining quiet, as I before observed, until I thought it probable that all had retired to bed in the house, I intimated to my keepers that I was under the necessity of requesting permission to retire for a few moments to the backyard; when both instantly arose and reeling towards me seized each an arm and proceeded to conduct me through a long and narrow entry to the back door, which was no sooner unbolted and opened by one of them than I tripped up the heels of both and laid them sprawling, and in a moment was at the garden wall seeking a passage whereby I might gain the public road. A new and unexpected obstacle now presented, for I found the whole garden enclosed with a smooth bricken [*sic*] wall, of the height of twelve feet at least, and was prevented by the darkness of the night from discovering an avenue leading therefrom. In this predicament my only alterna-

tive was either to scale this wall, handcuffed as I was and without a moment's hesitation, or to suffer myself to be made a captive of again by my keepers, who had already recovered their feet and were bellowing like bullocks for assistance. Had it not been a very dark night I must certainly have been discovered and retaken by them; fortunately before they had succeeded in rallying the family, in groping about I met with a fruit tree situated within ten or twelve feet of the wall, which I ascended as expeditiously as possible, and by an extraordinary leap from the branches reached the top of the wall, and was in an instant on the opposite side. The coast being now clear I ran to the distance of two or three miles with as much speed as my situation would admit of. My next object now was to rid myself of my handcuffs, which fortunately proving none of the stoutest, I succeeded in doing after much painful labour.

It was now, as I judged, about twelve o'clock, and I had succeeded in reaching a considerable distance from the inn from which I had made my escape, without hearing or seeing anything of my keepers whom I had left staggering about in the garden in search of their Yankee captive. It was indeed to their intoxicated state and the extreme darkness of the night that I imputed my success in evading their pursuit. I saw no one until about the break of day, when I met an old man tottering beneath the weight of his pickaxe, hoe and shovel, clad in tattered garments and otherwise the picture of poverty and distress. He had just left his humble dwelling and was proceeding thus early to his daily labour, and as I was now satisfied that it would be very difficult for me to travel in the daytime, garbed as I was in a sailor's habit, without exciting the suspicion of His Royal Majesty's pimps, who I had been informed were constantly on the lookout for deserters, I applied to the old man, miserable as he appeared, for a change of cloathing, offering those which I then wore for a suit of inferior quality and less value. This I was induced to do at that moment, as I thought



that the proposal could be made with perfect safety: for whatever might have been his suspicions as to my motives in wishing to exchange my dress, I doubted not that with an object of so much apparent distress self-interest would prevent his communicating them. The old man, however, appeared a little surprised at my offer, and after a short examination of my pea-jacket, trowsers, &c., expressed a doubt whether I would be willing to exchange them for his "Church Suit," which he represented as something worse for wear and not worth half so much as those I then wore. Taking courage, however, from my assurances that a change of dress was my only object, he deposited his tools by the side of a hedge and invited me to accompany him to his house, which we soon reached and entered, when a scene of poverty and wretchedness presented which exceeded everything of the kind I had ever before witnessed. The internal appearance of the miserable hovel I am confident would suffer in a comparison with any of the meanest stables of our American farmers; there was but one room, in one corner of which was a bed of straw covered with a coarse sheet, and on which reposed his wife and five small children. I had heard much of the impoverished and distressed situation of the poor in England, but the present presented an instance of which I had formed no conception. Little indeed did I then think that it would be my lot, before I should meet with an opportunity to return to my native land, to be placed in an infinitely worse situation—but alas, such was my hard fortune!

The first garment presented by the poor old man of his best or "church suit," as he termed it, was a coat of very coarse cloth, and containing a number of patches of almost every colour but that of the cloth of which it was originally made. The next was a waistcoat and a pair of small cloathes which appeared each to have received a bountiful supply of patches to correspond with the coat. The coat I put on without much difficulty, but the two other garments proved much too small for me, and when I had suc-

ceeded with considerable difficulty in putting them on, they set so taut as to cause me some apprehension that they might even stop the circulation of blood. My next exchange was my buff cap for an old, rusty, large-brimmed hat.

The old man appeared very much pleased with his bargain, and represented to his wife that he could now accompany her to church much more decently clad. He immediately tried on the pea-jacket and trowsers, and seemed to give himself very little concern about their size, although I am confident that one leg of the trowsers was sufficiently large to admit his whole body; but however ludicrous his appearance in his new suit, I am certain that it could not have been more so than mine, garbed as I was like an old man of seventy. From my old friend I learned the course that I must steer to reach London, the towns and villages that I should have to pass through and the distance thereto, which was between seventy and eighty miles. He likewise represented to me that the country was filled with soldiers, who were on the constant lookout for deserters from the navy and army, for the apprehension of which they received a stipulated reward.

After enjoining it on the old man not to give any information of me, should he meet on the road any one who should enquire for such a person, I took my leave of him and again set out with a determination to reach London thus disguised if possible. I travelled about thirty miles that day, and at night entered a barn, in hopes to find some straw or hay on which to repose for the night, for I had not money sufficient to pay for a night's lodging at a public house, had I thought it prudent to apply for one.

In my expectation to find either hay or straw in the barn I was sadly disappointed, for I soon found that it contained not a lock of either—and after groping about in the dark in search of something that might serve for a substitute, I found nothing better than an undressed sheepskin. With no other bed on which to re-

pose my weary limbs, I spent a sleepless night; cold, hungry and weary, and impatient for the arrival of the morning's dawn, that I might be enabled to pursue my journey.

By break of day I again set out, and soon found myself within the suburbs of a considerable village, in passing which I was fearful there would be some risk of detection, but to guard myself as much as possible against suspicion, I furnished myself with a crutch, and feigning myself a cripple, hobbled through the town without meeting with any interruption. In two hours after I arrived in the vicinity of another still more considerable village, but fortunately for me, at the moment I was overtaken by an empty baggage-wagon bound to London. Again feigning myself very lame, I begged of the driver to grant a poor cripple the indulgence to ride a few miles—to which he assenting, I concealed myself by lying prostrate on the bottom of the wagon until we had passed quite through the village, when finding the waggoner disposed to drive much slower than what I wished to travel, after thanking him for the kind disposition which he had manifested to oblige me, I quit the waggon, threw away my crutch and travelled with a speed calculated to surprise the driver with so sudden a recovery of the use of my legs. The reader will perceive that I had now become almost an adept at deception, which I would not, however, have so frequently practiced had not self-preservation demanded it.

As I thought there would be in my journey to London infinitely more danger of detection in passing through large towns and villages than in confining myself to the country, I avoided them as much as possible; and as I found myself once more on the borders of one, apparently of much larger size than any I had yet passed, I thought it most expedient to take a circuitous route to avoid it; in attempting which I met with an almost insurmountable obstacle that I little dreamed of. When nearly abreast of the town I found my route obstructed by a ditch, of upwards of

twelve feet in breadth and of what depth I could not determine. As there was now no other alternative left me but to leap this ditch, or to retrace my steps and pass through the town, after a moment's reflection I determined to attempt the former, although it would be attempting a feat of activity that I supposed myself incapable of performing. Yet, however incredible it may appear, I assure my readers that I did effect it, and reached the other side with dry feet.

I had now arrived within about sixteen miles of London, when night approaching, I again sought lodgings in a barn, which containing a small quantity of hay, I succeeded in obtaining a tolerable comfortable night's rest. By the dawn of day I arose somewhat refreshed, and resumed my journey with the pleasing prospect of reaching London before night; but while encouraged and cheered by these pleasing anticipations, an unexpected occurrence blasted my fair prospects. I had succeeded in reaching in safety a distance so great from the place where I had been last held a prisoner, and within so short a distance of London, the place of my destination, that I began to think myself so far out of danger as to cause me to relax in a measure in the precautionary means which I had made use of to avoid detection. As I was passing through the town of Staines, within a few miles of London, about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, I was met by three or four British soldiers whose notice I attracted, and who unfortunately for me discovered by the collar (which I had not taken the precaution to conceal) that I wore a shirt which exactly corresponded with those uniformly worn by His Majesty's seamen. Not being able to give a satisfactory account of myself, I was made a prisoner of on suspicion of being a deserter from His Majesty's service, and was immediately committed to the Round House—a prison so called, appropriated to the confinement of runaways and those convicted of small offences. I was committed in the evening, and to secure me the more effectually I was handcuffed, and left supperless by my unfeeling jailor, to pass the night in wretchedness.

I had now been three days without food (with the exception of a single two penny loaf) and felt myself unable much longer to resist the cravings of nature. My spirits, which until now had armed me with fortitude, began to forsake me; indeed, I was at this moment on the eve of despair, when calling to mind that grief would only aggravate my calamity, I endeavoured to arm my soul with patience, and habituate myself as well as I could to woe. Accordingly, I roused my spirits, and banishing for a few moments these gloomy ideas, I began to reflect seriously on the methods how to extricate myself from this labyrinth of horror.

My first object was to rid myself of my handcuffs, which I succeeded in doing after two hours' hard labour, by sawing them across the grating of the window. Having my hands now at liberty, the next thing to be done was to force the door of my apartment, which was secured on the outside by a hasp and padlock. I devised many schemes, but for the want of tools to work with was unable to carry them into execution. I, however, at length succeeded, with the assistance of no other instrument than the bolt of my handcuffs, with which, thrusting my arm through a small window or aperture in the door, I forced the padlock—and as there was now no other barrier to prevent my escape, after an imprisonment of about five hours I was once more at large.

It was now, as I judged, about midnight, and although enfeebled and tormented with excessive hunger and fatigue, I set out with the determination of reaching London, if possible, early the ensuing morning. By break of day I reached and passed through Brentford, a town of considerable note and within six miles of the capital—but so great was my hunger at this moment that I was under serious apprehension of falling a victim to absolute starvation, if not so fortunate soon [as] to obtain something to appease it. I recollected of having read in my youth accounts of the dreadful effects of hunger, which had led men to the commission of the

most horrible excesses, but did not then think that fate would ever thereafter doom me to an almost similar situation.

When I made my escape from the prison ship six English pennies was all the money that I possessed. With two I had purchased a two-penny loaf the day after I had escaped from my keepers at the inn, and the other four still remained in my possession, not having met with a favourable opportunity since the purchase of the first loaf, to purchase food of any kind. When I had arrived at the distance of one and a half miles from Brentford I met with a labourer employed in building a pale fence, to whom my deplorable situation induced me to apply for work, or for information of any one in the neighbourhood that might be in want of a hand to work at farming or gardening. He informed me that he did not wish, himself, to hire, but that Sir John Millet, whose seat he represented [to be], but a short distance [away], was in the habit of employing many hands at that season of the year (which was in the spring of 1776) and he doubted not but that I might there meet with employment.

With my spirits a little revived at even a distant prospect of obtaining something to alleviate my sufferings, I started in quest of the seat of Sir John, agreeable to the directions which I had received; in attempting to reach which I mistook my way and proceeded up a gravelled and beautifully ornamented walk, which unconsciously led me directly to the garden of the Princess Amelia. I had approached within view of the royal mansion, when a glimpse of a number of "redcoats" who thronged the yard satisfied me of my mistake, and caused me to make an instantaneous and precipitate retreat; being determined not to afford any more of their mess an opportunity of boasting of the capture of a "Yankee rebel." Indeed, a wolf or bear of the American wilderness could not be more terrified or panic-struck at the sight of a firebrand than I then was at that of a British red coat!

Having succeeded in making good my retreat from the garden of Her Highness without being discovered, I took another path, which led me to where a number of labourers were employed in shovelling gravel, and to whom I repeated my enquiry if they could inform me any want of help, &c. "Why, in troth, friend," answered one in a dialect peculiar to the labouring class of people of that part of the country, "me master, Sir John, hires a goodly many, and as we've a deal of work now, maybe he'll hire you; s'pose he [*sic*] stop a little with us until work is done he [*sic*] may then gang along and we'll question Sir John whether him be wanting another like us or no."

Although I was sensible that an application of this kind might lead to a discovery of my situation, whereby I might be again deprived of my liberty and immured in a loathsome prison, yet, as there was now no other alternative left me but to seek in this way something to satisfy the cravings of hunger, or to yield a victim to starvation with all its attending horrors, of the two evils I preferred the least, and concluded as the honest labourer had proposed, to await until they had completed their work and then to accompany them home to ascertain the will of Sir John.

As I had heard much of the tyrannical and domineering disposition of the rich and purse-proud of England, and who were generally the lords of the manor and the particular favourites of the Crown, it was not without feeling a very considerable degree of diffidence that I introduced myself into the presence of one whom I strongly suspected to be of that class. But what was peculiarly fortunate for me, a short acquaintance was sufficient to satisfy me that as regarded this gentleman my apprehensions were without cause. I found him walking in his front yard in company with several gentlemen, and on being made acquainted with my business his first enquiry was, whether I had a hoe or money to purchase one; and on being answered in the negative he requested me

to call early the ensuing morning and he would endeavour to furnish me with one.

It is impossible for me to express the satisfaction that I felt at the prospect of a deliverance from my wretched situation. I was now, by so long fasting, reduced to such a state of weakness that my legs were hardly able to support me, and it was with extreme difficulty that I succeeded in reaching a baker's shop in the neighbourhood, where with my four remaining pennies, which I had reserved for a last resource, I purchased two two-penny loaves.

After four days of intolerable hunger the reader may judge how great must have been my joy to find myself in possession of even a morsel to appease it. Well might I have exclaimed at this moment with the unfortunate Trenck: "O Nature! what delight hast thou combined with the gratification of thy wants! Remember this, ye who rack invention to excite appetite, and which yet you cannot procure; remember how simple are the means that will give a crust of mouldy bread a flavour more exquisite than all the spices of the East or all the profusion of land or sea; remember this, grow hungry and indulge your sensuality." Although five times the quantity of the "staff of life" would have been insufficient to have satisfied my appetite, yet, as I thought it improbable that I should be indulged with a mouthful of anything to eat in the morning, I concluded to eat then but one loaf and to reserve the other for another meal; but having eaten one, so far from satisfying it seemed rather to increase my appetite for the other. The temptation was irresistible, the cravings of hunger predominated and would not be satisfied until I had devoured the remaining one.

The day was now far spent, and I was compelled to resort with reluctance to a carriage-house, to spend another night in misery. I found nothing therein on which to repose my wearied limbs but the bare floor, which was sufficient to deprive me of sleep, how-



ever much exhausted nature required it. My spirits were, however, buoyed up by the pleasing consolation that the succeeding day would bring relief. As soon as daylight appeared I hastened to await the commands of one whom, since my first introduction, I could not but flatter myself would prove my benefactor and afford me that relief which my pitiful situation so much required. It was an hour much earlier than that at which even the domestics were in the habit of rising, and I had been a considerable time walking back and forth in the barnyard before any made their appearance. It was now about four o'clock, and by the person of whom I made the enquiry I was informed that eight o'clock was the usual hour in which the labourers commenced their day's work. Permission was granted me by this person (who had the care of the stable) to repose myself on some straw beneath the manger until they should be in readiness to depart to commence their day's work; in the four hours I had a more comfortable nap than any that I had enjoyed the four preceding nights. At eight o'clock precisely all hands were called and preparations made for a commencement of the labour of the day. I was furnished with a large iron fork and a hoe, and ordered by my employer to accompany them; and although my strength at this moment was hardly sufficient to enable me to bear even so light a burthen, yet I was unwilling to expose my weakness so long as it could be avoided. But the time had now arrived in which it was impossible for me any longer to conceal it, and I had to confess the cause to my fellow-labourers, so far as to declare to them that such had been my state of poverty that, with the exception of the four small loaves of bread, I had not tasted food for four days! I was not, I must confess, displeased nor a little disappointed to witness the evident emotions of pity and commiseration which this woeful declaration appeared to excite in their minds; as I had supposed them too much accustomed to witness scenes of misery and distress to have their feelings much affected by a brief recital

of my sufferings and deprivations; but in justice to them I must say that although a very illiterate I found them (with a few exceptions) a humane and benevolent people.

About eleven o'clock we were visited by our employer, Sir John—who noticing me particularly, and perceiving the little progress I made in my labour observed, that although I had the appearance of being a stout, hearty man, yet I either feigned myself or really was, a very weak one; on which it was immediately observed by one of my friendly fellow-labourers that it was not surprising that I lacked strength, as I had eaten nothing of consequence for four days! Mr. Millet, who appeared at first little disposed to credit the fact, on being assured by me that it was really so, put a shilling into my hand and bid me go immediately and purchase to that amount in bread and meat—a request which the reader may suppose I did not hesitate to comply with.

Having made a tolerable meal and feeling somewhat refreshed thereby, I was on my return, when I was met by my fellow-labourers on their return home, four o'clock being the hour in [*sic*] which they usually quit work. As soon as we arrived some victuals were ordered for me by Sir John, when the maid presenting a much smaller quantity than what her benevolent master supposed sufficient to satisfy the appetite of one who had been four days fasting, she was ordered to return and bring out the platter and the whole of its contents, and of which I was requested to eat my fill—but of which I eat sparingly to prevent the dangerous consequences which might have resulted from my voracity in the debilitated state to which my stomach was reduced.

My light repast being over, one of the men were [*sic*] ordered by my hospitable friend to provide for me a comfortable bed in the barn, where I spent the night on a couch of clean straw, more sweetly than ever I had done in the days of my better fortune. I arose early, much refreshed, and was preparing after breakfast

to accompany the labourers to their work, which was no sooner discovered by Sir John than, smiling, he bid me return to my couch and there remain until I was in a better state to resume my labours; indeed the generous compassion and benevolence of this gentleman was unbounded. After having on that day partook of an excellent dinner, which had been provided expressly for me, and the domestics having been ordered to retire, I was not a little surprised to hear myself thus addressed by him: "My honest friend, I perceive that you are a seafaring man, and your history probably is a secret which you may not wish to divulge; but whatever circumstances may have attended you, you may make them known to me with the greatest safety, for I pledge my honour I will never betray you."

Having experienced so many proofs of the friendly disposition of Mr. Millet, I could not hesitate a moment to comply with his request, and without attempting to conceal a single fact made him acquainted with every circumstance that had attended me since my first enlistment as a soldier. After expressing his regret that there should be any of his countrymen found so void of the principles of humanity as to treat thus an unfortunate prisoner of war, he assured me that so long as I remained in his employ he would guarantee my safety—adding, that notwithstanding (in consequence of the unhappy differences which then prevailed between Great Britain and her American colonies) the inhabitants of the latter were denominated *Rebels*, yet they were not without their friends in England, who wished well to their cause and would cheerfully aid them whenever an opportunity should present. He represented the soldiers (whom it had been reported to me were constantly on the lookout for deserters) as a set of mean and contemptible wretches, little better than a lawless banditti, who to obtain the fee awarded by Government for the apprehension of a deserter, would betray their best friend.

Having been generously supplied with a new suit of cloathes and other necessities by Mr. M., I contracted with him for six months to superintend his strawberry garden—in the course of which, so far from being molested I was not suspected by even his own domestics of being an American. At the expiration of the six months, by the recommendation of my hospitable friend I got a berth in the garden of the Princess Amelia, where, although among my fellow-labourers the American rebellion was not unfrequently the topic of conversation and the “d—d Yankee rebels,” as they termed them, frequently the subjects of their vilest abuse, I was little suspected of being one of that class whom they were pleased thus to denominate. I must confess that it was not without some difficulty that I was enabled to suppress the indignant feelings occasioned by hearing my countrymen spoken so disrespectfully of, but as a single word in their favour might have betrayed me, I could obtain no other satisfaction than by secretly indulging the hope that I might, before the conclusion of the war, have an opportunity to repay them in their own coin with interest. I remained in the employ of the Princess about three months, and then in consequence of a misunderstanding with the overseer I hired myself to a farmer in a small village adjoining Brentford, where I had not been three weeks employed before rumour was afloat that I was a Yankee prisoner of war! From whence the report arose, or by what occasioned, I never could learn. It no sooner reached the ears of the soldiers than they were on the alert, seeking an opportunity to seize my person. Fortunately I was apprised of their intentions before they had time to carry them into effect; I was, however, hard pushed, and sought for by them with that diligence and perseverance that certainly deserved a better cause. I had many hairbreadth escapes and most assuredly should have been taken, had it not been for the friendship of those whom I suspect felt not less friendly to the cause of my country, but dare not publicly avow it. I was at

one time traced by the soldiers in pursuit of me to the house of one of this description, in whose garret I was concealed, and was at that moment in bed. They entered and enquired for me, and on being told I was not in the house they insisted on searching, and were in the act of ascending the chamber stairs for that purpose, when seizing my cloathes I passed up through the scuttle and reached the roof of the house, and from thence half-naked passed to those of the adjoining ones to the number of ten or twelve, and succeeded in making my escape without being discovered.

Being continually harassed by night and day by the soldiers, and driven from place to place without an opportunity to perform a day's work, I was advised by one whose sincerity I could not doubt, to apply for a berth as a labourer in a garden of His Royal Majesty, situated in the village of Kew, a few miles from Brentford, where under the protection of His Majesty it was represented to me that I should be perfectly safe, as the soldiers dare not approach the royal premises to molest any one there employed. He was indeed so friendly as to introduce me personally to the overseer as an acquaintance who possessed a perfect knowledge of gardening, but from whom he carefully concealed the fact of my being an American born and of the suspicion entertained by some of my being a prisoner of war who had escaped the vigilance of my keepers.

The overseer concluded to receive me on trial. It was here that I had not only frequent opportunities to see His Royal Majesty in person, in his frequent resorts to this, one of his country retreats, but once had the honour of being addressed by him. The fact was that I had not been one week employed in the garden before the suspicion of my being either a prisoner of war or a spy in the employ of the Americans rebels, was communicated not only to the overseer and other persons employed in the garden,

but even to the King himself! As I was one day busily engaged with three others in gravelling a walk, I was unexpectedly accosted by His Majesty, who, with much apparent good nature, enquired of me of what country I was. "An American born, may it please Your Majesty," was my reply (taking off my hat, which he requested me instantly to replace on my head). "Ah," continued he, with a smile, "an American, a stubborn, a very stubborn people, indeed! And what brought you to this country and how long have you been here?" "The fate of war, Your Majesty; I was brought to this country a prisoner about eleven months since"—and thinking this a favourable opportunity to acquaint him with a few of my grievances, I briefly stated to him how much I had been harassed by the soldiers. "While here employed they will not trouble you," was the only reply he made, and passed on. The familiar manner in which I had been interrogated by His Majesty had, I must confess, a tendency in some degree to prepossess me in his favour; I at least suspected him to possess a disposition less tyrannical and capable of better views than what had been imputed to him; and as I had frequently heard it represented in America that, uninfluenced by such of his Ministers as unwisely disregarded the reiterated complaints of the American people, he would have been foremost to have redressed their grievances, of which they so justly complained.

I continued in the service of His Majesty's gardener at Kew about four months, when the season having arrived when the work of the garden required less labourers, I with three others was discharged, and the day after engaged myself for a few months to a farmer in the town and neighbourhood where I had been last employed. But not one week had expired before the old story of my being an American prisoner of war, &c., was revived and industriously circulated, and the soldiers, eager to obtain the proffered bounty, like a pack of bloodhounds were again on the track, seeking an opportunity to surprise me. The house wherein I had

taken up my abode was several times thoroughly searched by them, but I was always so fortunate as to discover their approach in season to make good my escape by the assistance of a friend. To so much inconvenience, however, did this continual apprehension and fear subject me, that I was finally half resolved to surrender myself a prisoner to some of His Majesty's officers and submit to my fate, whatever it might be, when by an unexpected occurrence and the seasonable interposition of Providence in my favour, I was induced to change my resolution.

I had been strongly of the opinion, by what I had myself experienced, that America was not without her friends in England, and those who were her well-wishers in the important cause in which she was at that moment engaged; an opinion which I think no one will disagree with me in saying was somewhat confirmed by a circumstance of that importance as entitles it to a conspicuous place in my narrative. At a moment when driven almost to a state of despondency by continual alarms and fears of falling into the hands of a set of desperadoes who, for a very small reward, would willingly have undertaken the commission of almost any crime, I received a message from a gentleman of respectability of Brentford (J. Woodcock, Esq.), requesting me to repair immediately to his house. The invitation I was disposed to pay but little attention to, as I viewed it [as] nothing more than a plan of my pursuers to decoy and entrap me; but on learning from my confidential friend that the gentleman by whom the message had been sent was one whose loyalty had been doubted, I was induced to comply with the request.

I reached the house of 'Squire Woodcock \* about eight o'clock in the evening, and after receiving from him at the door assurances

\* Squire Woodcock was no doubt *Charles*, who died 1792, leaving one son, Charles Bridges Woodcock, who was admitted to Lincoln's Inn Oct. 31, 1789.

The father was evidently a well-to-do citizen, as he is on record as buying the property of the Brentford Market in 1768, in partnership with others, whom he subsequently bought out.

that I might enter without fear or apprehension of any design on his part against me, I suffered myself to be introduced into a private chamber, where were seated two other gentlemen, who appeared to be persons of no mean rank and [who] proved to be no other than Horne Tooke<sup>1</sup> and James Bridges,<sup>2</sup> Esquires. As all three of these gentlemen have long since paid the debt of nature, and are placed beyond the reach of such as might be disposed to persecute or reproach them for their disloyalty, I can now with perfect safety disclose their names—names which ought to be dear to every true American.

After having (by their particular request) furnished these gentlemen with a brief account of the most important incidents of my life, I underwent a very strict examination, as they seemed determined to satisfy themselves, before they made any important advances or disclosures, that I was a person in whom they could repose implicit confidence. Finding me firmly attached to the interests of my country, so much so as to be willing to sacrifice even my life if necessary in her behalf, they began to address me with less reserve; and after bestowing the highest encomiums on my countrymen for the bravery which they had displayed in their recent engagements with the British troops, as well as for their patriotism in publicly manifesting their abhorrence and detestation of the ministerial party in England, who to alienate their affections and enslave them had endeavoured to subvert the British Constitution, they enquired of me if (to promote the interests of my country) I should have any objection to take a trip to Paris on an important mission, if my passage and other expenses were

<sup>1</sup> Horne Tooke was of course John Horne Tooke, the famous philosopher and philologist,

<sup>2</sup> James Bridges I have been unable to identify, even with the aid of an expert genealogist in London—unless, as is probable, he was really John Edward Bridges. The latter was a Brentwood voter in 1802—possibly a son of James.

The fact that Charles Woodcock's only son bore the name of Charles Bridges Woodcock points to a relationship between the two families.

(As there was a *John* Bridges in Brentford in 1792, it may be that Potter was wrong in calling him *James*.)



paid and generous compensation allowed me for my trouble, and which in all probability would lead to the means whereby I might be enabled to return to my country—to which I replied that I should have none. After having enjoined upon me to keep everything which they had communicated a profound secret, they presented me with a guinea and a letter for a gentleman in White Waltham (a country town about thirty miles from Brentford), which they requested me to reach as soon as possible and there remain until they should send for me, and by no means to fail to arrive at the precise hour that they should appoint.

After partaking of a little light refreshment, I set out at twelve o'clock at night and reached White Waltham at half-past eleven the succeeding day, and immediately waited on and presented the letter to the gentleman to whom it was directed, and who gave me a very cordial reception, and whom I soon found was as real a friend to America's cause as the three gentlemen in whose company I had last been. It was from him that I received the first information of the evacuation of Boston by the British troops, and of the DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE by the American Congress. He indeed appeared to possess a knowledge of almost every important transaction in America since the memorable battle of Bunker Hill, and it was to him that I was indebted for many particulars, not a little interesting to myself and which I might otherwise have remained ignorant of, as I have always found it a principle of the Britons to conceal everything calculated to diminish or tarnish their fame as a "great and powerful nation."

I remained in the family of this gentleman about a fortnight, when I received a letter from 'Squire Woodcock requesting me to be at his house without fail precisely at two o'clock the morning ensuing; in compliance of which I packed up and started immediately for Brentford, and reached the house of 'Squire Woodcock at the appointed hour. I found there in company with the

latter the two gentlemen whose names I have before mentioned, and by whom the object of my mission to Paris was now made known to me—which was, to convey in the most secret manner possible a letter to DR. FRANKLIN. Everything was in readiness, and a chaise ready harnessed which was to convey me to Charing Cross, waited at the door. I was presented with a pair of boots, made expressly for me and for the safe conveyance of the letter of which I was to be the bearer; one of them contained a false heel, in which the letter was deposited, and was to be thus conveyed to the Doctor. After again repeating my former declaration that, whatever might be my fate, they should never be exposed, I departed, and was conveyed in quick time to Charing Cross, where I took the post-coach for Dover, and from thence was immediately conveyed in a packet to Calais, and in fifteen minutes after landing started for Paris, which I reached in safety, and delivered to DR. FRANKLIN the letter of which I was the bearer.

What were the contents of this letter I was never informed and never knew, but had little doubt but that it contained important information relative to the views of the British Cabinet as regarded the affairs of America—and although I well knew that a discovery while within the British dominions would have proved equally fatal to me as to the gentlemen by whom I was employed, yet I most solemnly declare that to be serviceable to my country at that important period was much more of an object with me than the reward which I had been promised, however considerable it might be. My interview with DR. FRANKLIN was a pleasing one; for nearly an hour he conversed with me in the most agreeable and instructive manner, and listened to the tale of my sufferings with much apparent interest, and seemed disposed to encourage me with the assurance that if the Americans should succeed in their grand object and firmly establish their independence, they would not fail to remunerate their soldiers for their services.

But, alas, as regards myself these assurances have not as yet been verified! I am confident, however, that had it been a possible thing for that great and good man (whose humanity and generosity have been the theme of infinitely abler pens than mine) to have lived to this day, I should not have petitioned my country in vain for a momentary enjoyment of that provision which has been extended to so great a portion of my fellow-soldiers, whose hardships and deprivations in the cause of their country could not, I am sure, have been half so great as mine.

After remaining two days in Paris, letters were delivered to me by the Doctor, to convey to the gentlemen by whom I had been employed, and for their better security as well as my own I deposited, as the other, in the heel of my boot, and with which, to the great satisfaction of my friends, I reached Brentford in safety and without exciting the suspicion of any one as to the important (although somewhat dangerous) mission that I had been engaged in. I remained secreted in the house of 'Squire Woodcock a few days, and then by his and the two other gentlemen's request, made a second trip to Paris, and in reaching which and delivering my letters, was equally as fortunate as in my first. If I should succeed in returning in safety to Brentford, I was (agreeable to the generous proposal of DR. FRANKLIN) to return immediately to France, from whence he was to procure me a passage to America. But although in my return I met with no difficulty, yet, as if Fate had selected me as a victim to endure the miseries and privations which afterwards attended me, but three hours before I reached Dover to engage a passage for the third and last time to Calais, all intercourse between the two countries was prohibited!

My flattering expectations of being enabled soon to return to my native country, and once more to meet and enjoy the society of my friends after an absence of more than twelve months being thus by an unforeseen circumstance completely destroyed, I re-

turned immediately to the gentlemen by whom I had been last employed, to advise with them what it would be best for me to do in my then unpleasant situation; for, indeed, as all prospects were now at an end of meeting with an opportunity very soon to return to America, I could not bear the idea of remaining any longer in a neighbourhood where I was so strongly suspected of being a fugitive from justice, and under continual apprehension and immured like a felon in a dungeon.

By these gentlemen I was advised to repair immediately to London, where employed as a labourer, if I did not imprudently betray myself, they thought there was little probability of my being suspected of being an American. This advice I readily accepted, as the plan was such a one as exactly accorded with my opinion, for from the very moment that I first escaped from the clutches of my captors, I thought that in the city of London I should not be so liable to be suspected and harassed by the soldiers as I should to remain in the country. These gentlemen supplied me with money sufficient to defray my expenses, and would have willingly furnished me with recommendations had they not been fearful that if I should be so unfortunate as to be recognized by any one acquainted with the circumstance of my capture and escape, those recommendations (as their loyalty was already doubted) might operate much against them, inasmuch as they might furnish a clue to the discovery of some transactions which they then felt unwilling to have exposed. I ought here to state that before I set out for London I was entrusted by these gentlemen with five guineas, which I was requested to convey and distribute among a number of Americans there confined as prisoners of war in one of the city prisons.

I reached London late in the evening, and the next day engaged board at five shillings per week, at a public house in Lombard street, where, under a fictitious name, I passed for a farmer from Lincolnshire. My next object was to find my way to the

prison where were confined as prisoners of war a number of my countrymen, and among whom I was directed to distribute the five guineas with which I had been entrusted for that purpose by their friends at Brentford. I found the prison without much difficulty, but it was with very considerable difficulty that I gained admittance, and not until I had presented the turnkey with a considerable fee would he consent to indulge me. The reader will suppose that I must have been very much surprised when, as soon as the door of the prisoners' apartment was opened and I had passed the threshold, to hear one of them exclaim with much apparent astonishment, "Potter, is that you? How in the name of Heaven came you here!" An exclamation like this by one of a number to whom I supposed myself a perfect stranger, caused me much uneasiness for a few moments, as I expected nothing less than to recognize in this man some one of my old shipmates who had undoubtedly a knowledge of the fact of my being a prisoner of war and having been confined as such on board the guard-ship at Spithead. But in this I soon found to my satisfaction that I was mistaken, for after viewing for a moment the person by whom I had been thus addressed I discovered him to be no other than my old friend, Sergeant Singles,\* with whom I had been intimately acquainted in America. As the exclamation was in presence of the turnkey, lest I should have the key turned upon *me*, and so be considered as lawful a prisoner as any of the rest, I hinted to my friend that he certainly mistook me, a Lincolnshire farmer, for another person; and by a wink which he received from me at the same moment gave him to understand that a renewal of our ac-

\* A careful search of London records, including the Captain's and Master's logs of the *Tartar*, does not yield any information about the Sergeant, or of the fifteen American prisoners whom Potter saw. As the log-books examined were not dated, they are probably later than 1780, and it may be that some later and more fortunate searcher may yet find particulars of them. It is certainly strange that there should have been any such prisoners in London, as Portsmouth or Plymouth were the usual places of confinement (Dartmoor not being in existence before 1805).

quaintance or an exchange of civilities would be more agreeable to me at any other time.

I now, as I had been requested, divided the money as equally as possible among them, and to prevent the suspicions of the keeper, I represented to them in a feigned dialect peculiar to the labouring people of the shire-towns, that "me master was owing a little trifle or so to a rebel trader of one of His Majesty's American provinces, and was [re] quested by him to pay the balance and so to his brother Yankee rebels here imprisoned." I found the poor fellows (fifteen in number) confined in a dark, filthy apartment of about eighteen feet square, and which I could not perceive contained anything but a rough plank bench of about ten feet in length and a heap of straw, with one or two tattered, filthy-looking blankets spread thereon, which was probably the only bedding allowed them. Although their situation was such as could not fail to excite my pity, yet I could do no more than lament that it was not in my power to relieve them. How long they remained thus confined, or when exchanged, I could never learn, as I never to my knowledge saw one of them afterwards.

For four or five days after I reached London I did very little more than walk about the city, viewing such curiosities as met my eye; when reflecting that remaining thus idle I should not only be very soon out of funds, but should run the risk of being suspected and apprehended as one belonging to one of the numerous gangs of pickpockets, &c., which infest [ed] the streets of the city, I applied to an Intelligence Office for a coachman's berth, which I was so fortunate as to be able to procure, at fifteen shillings per week. My employer (J. Hyslop, Esq.), although rigid in his exactions was punctual in his payments, and by my strict prudence and abstinence from the numerous diversions of the city, I was enabled, in the six months which I served him, to lay up more cash than what I had earned the twelve months preceding. The next busi-

ness in which I engaged was that of brickmaking, and which, together with that of gardening, I pursued in the summer seasons almost exclusively for five years; in all which time I was not once suspected of being an American. Yet I must confess that my feelings were not unfrequently most powerfully wrought upon by hearing my countrymen dubbed with cowardice—and by those, too, who had been thrice flogged or frightened by them when attempting to ascend the heights of Bunker Hill! And to be obliged to brook these insults with impunity, as to have resented them would have caused me to have been suspected directly of being attached to the American cause, which might have been attended with serious consequences.

I should now pass over the five years that I was employed as above mentioned, as checkered by few incidents worth relating, was it not for one or two circumstances of some little importance that either attended me or came within my own personal knowledge. The reader has undoubtedly heard that the city of London and its suburbs is always more or less infested with gangs of nefarious wretches, who come under the denominations of Robbers, Pickpockets, Shoplifters, Swindlers, Beggars, &c., who are constantly prowling the streets in disguise, seeking opportunities to surprise and depredate on the weak and unguarded. Of these they form no inconsiderable portion, who contrive to elude and set at defiance the utmost vigilance of Government. They are a class who in the daytime disperse each to his avocation, as (the better to blind the scrutinizing eye of justice) they make it a principle to follow some laborious profession, and at night assemble to proceed on their nocturnal rounds in quest of those whose well-stored pockets promise them a reward equal to the risk which they run in obtaining it. As I was one evening passing through Hyde Park, with five guineas and a few pennies in my pockets, I was stopped by six of these lawless footpads, who, presenting pistols at my breast, demanded my money. Fortunately for me I had

previously deposited the guineas in a private pocket of my pantaloons for their better security. Thrusting their hands into my other pockets and finding me in possession of but a few English pennies, they took them and decamped. I hastened to Bow street and lodged information of the robbery with the officers, and who to my no little surprise informed me that mine was the fifth instance of information of similar robberies by the same gang which had been lodged with them that evening. Runners had been sent in every direction in pursuit of them, but with what success I could never learn.

Despairing of meeting with a favourable opportunity to return to America until the conclusion of peace, and the prospects of a continuation of the war being as great then (by what I could learn) as at any period from its commencement, I became more reconciled to my situation, and contracted an intimacy with a young woman whose parents were poor, but respectable, and whom I soon after married. I took a small ready-furnished chamber in Red Cross Street, where, with the fruits of my hard earnings, I was enabled to live tolerably comfortable for three or four years, when, by sickness and other unavoidable circumstances, I was doomed to endure miseries uncommon to human nature.

In the winter of 1781 news was received in London of the surrender of the army of Lord Cornwallis to the French and American forces! The receipt of news of an event so unexpected on the British ministers and members of Parliament was like a tremendous clap of thunder. Deep sorrow was evidently depicted in the countenances of those who had been the most strenuous advocates for the war. Never was there a time in which I longed more to exult, and to declare myself a true-blooded Yankee. And what was still more pleasing to me was to find myself even surpassed in expressions of joy and satisfaction by my wife, in consequence of the receipt of news which, while it went to establish the military fame of my countrymen, was so calculated to



humble the pride of her own. Greater proofs of her regard for me and my country I could not require.

The Ministerial party in Parliament, who had been the instigators of the war and who believed that even a view of the bright glittering muskets and bayonets of John Bull would frighten the leather-apron Yankees to a speedy submission, began now to harbour a more favourable opinion of the courage of the latter. His Majesty repaired immediately to the House of Peers and opened the sessions of Parliament. Warm debates took place on account of the ruinous manner in which the American war was continued; but Lord North and his party appeared yet unwilling to give up the contest. The capitulation of Cornwallis had, however, one good effect, as it produced the immediate release of Mr. Laurens\* from the Tower, and although it did not put an immediate end to the war, yet all hopes of conquering America from that moment appeared to be given up by all except North and his adherents.

There was no one engaged in the cause of America that did more to establish her fame in England, and to satisfy the high-boasting Britons of the bravery and unconquerable resolutions of the Yankees than that bold adventurer, Captain Paul Jones, who for ten or eleven months kept all the western coast of the island in alarm. He boldly landed at Whitehaven, where he burnt a ship in the harbour, and even attempted to burn the town; nor was this, to my knowledge, the only instance in which the Britons were threatened with a very serious conflagration by the instigation of their enemies abroad. A daring attempt was made by one James Aitkin,\*\* commonly known in London by the name of John the

\* Henry Laurens was confined in the Tower of London on "suspicion of high treason" for nearly fifteen months, from October 6, 1780, denied medical attendance or the use of pen and ink. Soon after December, 1781, he was released without trial.

\*\* A broadside of the day describes him as "James Hill, *alias* John the Painter," and gives his alleged confession, in which he states that Silas Deane, then at Paris, dissuaded him from killing George III, but gave him money to enable him to burn the Portsmouth dockyard, where he did set fire to one of the buildings December 7, 1776. He was hung March 10, 1777, at Portsmouth. (See frontispiece.)

Painter, to set fire to the royal dock and shipping at Portsmouth; and [he] would probably have succeeded had he not imprudently communicated his intentions to one who, for the sake of a few guineas, shamefully betrayed him. Poor Aitkin was immediately seized, tried, condemned, executed and hung in chains. Every means was used to extort from him a confession by whom he had been employed, but without any success. It was, however, strongly suspected that he had been employed by the French, as it was about the time that they openly declared themselves in favour of the Americans.

With regard to Mr. Laurens, I ought to have mentioned that as soon as I heard of his capture on his passage to Holland and of his confinement in the Tower, I applied for and obtained permission to visit him in his apartment, and (with some distant hopes that he might point out some way in which I might be enabled to return to America) I stated to him every particular as regarded my situation. He seemed not only to lament very much my hard fortune, but (to use his own words) "that America should be deprived of the services of such men, at the important period, too, when she most required them." He informed me that he was himself held a prisoner and knew not when or on what conditions he would be liberated; but should he thereafter be in a situation to assist me in obtaining a passage to America he should consider it a duty which he owed his country to do it.

Although I succeeded in obtaining by my industry a tolerable living for myself and family, yet so far from becoming reconciled to my situation I was impatient for the return of peace, when (as I then flattered myself) I should once more have an opportunity to return to my native country. I became every day less attached to a country where I could not meet with anything (with the exception of my little family) that could compensate me for the loss of the pleasing society of my kindred and friends in America.

Born among a moral and humane people, and having in my early days contracted their habits and a considerable number of their prejudices, it would be unnatural to suppose that I should not prefer their society to either that of rogues, thieves, pimps and vagabonds, or of a more honest but an exceedingly oppressed and forlorn people.

I found London as it had been represented to me, a large and magnificent city, filled with inhabitants of almost every description and occupation, and such an one, indeed, as might be pleasing to an Englishman, delighting in tumult and confusion and accustomed to witness scenes of riot and dissipation, as well as those of human infliction, and for the sake of variety would be willing to imprison himself within the walls of a Bedlam, where continual noise would deafen him, where the unwholesomeness of the air would affect his lungs, and where the closeness of the surrounding buildings would not permit him to enjoy the enlivening influence of the sun! There is not perhaps another city of its size in the whole world the streets of which display a greater contrast, in the wealth and misery, the honesty and knavery of its inhabitants, than the city of London. The eyes of the passing stranger, unaccustomed to witness such scenes, are at one moment dazzled by the appearance of pompous wealth with its splendid equipage—at the next he is solicited by one apparently of the most wretched of human beings to impart a single penny for the relief of his starving family. Among the latter class there are many, however, who so far from being the real objects of charity that they represent themselves to be, actually possess more wealth than those who sometimes benevolently bestow it. These vile impostors, by every species of deception that was ever devised or practiced by man, aim to excite the pity and compassion and to extort charity from those unacquainted with their easy circumstances. They possess the faculty of assuming any character that may best suit their purpose—sometimes hobbling with a crutch and exhibit-

ing a wooden leg, at other times "an honourable scar of a wound received in Egypt, at Waterloo or at Trafalgar, fighting for their most gracious sovereign and master, King George!"

Independent of these there is another species of beggars, the gypsies, who form a distinct clan and will associate with none but those of their own tribe. They are notorious thieves as well as beggars, and constantly infest the streets of London, to the great annoyance of strangers and those who have the appearance of being wealthy. They have no particular home or abiding place, but encamp about in open fields or under hedges as occasion requires. They are generally of a yellow complexion and converse in a dialect peculiar only to themselves. Their thieving propensities does [*sic*] not unfrequently lead them to kidnap little children whenever an opportunity presents. Having first by a dye changed their complexions to one that corresponds with their own they represent them as their own offspring, and carry them about half-naked on their backs to excite the pity and compassion of those of whom they beg charity. An instance of this species of theft by a party of these unprincipled vagabonds occurred once in my neighbourhood while an inhabitant of London. The little girl kidnapped was the daughter of a Captain Kellem of Coventry street. Being sent abroad on some business for her parents, she was met by a gang of gypsies, consisting of five men and six women, who seized her and forcibly carried her away to their camp in the country at a considerable distance, having first stripped her of her own clothes, and in exchange dressed her in some of their rags. Thus garbed, she travelled about the country with them for nearly seven months, and was treated as the most abject slave, and her life threatened if she should endeavour to escape or divulge her story. She stated that during the time she was with them they entrapped a little boy about her own age, whom they also stripped and carried with them, but took particular care he should never converse with her, treating him in the like savage

manner. She said they generally travelled by cross-roads and private ways, ever keeping a watchful eye that she might not escape, and that no opportunity offered until when, by some accident, they were obliged to send her from their camp to a neighbouring farm house in order to procure a light, which she took advantage of, and scrambling over hedges and ditches as she supposed for the distance of eight or nine miles, reached London worn out with fatigue and hunger, her support with them being always scanty and of the worst sort. It was the intention of the gypsies, she said, to have coloured her and the boy when the walnut season approached.

The streets of London and its suburbs are also infested with another and a still more dreadful species of rogues, denominated Footpads, and who often murder in the most inhuman manner, for the sake of only a few shillings, any unfortunate people who happen to fall in their way. Of this I was made acquainted with innumerable instances while an inhabitant of London. I shall, however, mention but two that I have now recollection of: A Mr. Wylde while passing through Marlborough street in a chaise, was stopped by a footpad who, on demanding his money, received a few shillings, but being dissatisfied with the little booty he obtained, still kept a pistol at Mr. Wylde's head, and on the latter's attempting gently to turn it aside the villain fired, and lodged seven slugs in his head and breast which caused instant death. Mr. W. expired in the arms of his son and grandson without a groan. A few days after, as a Mr. Greenhill was passing through York street in a single-horse chaise, he was met and stopped by three footpads armed with pistols. One of them seized and held the horse's head, while the other two most inhumanly dragged Mr. G. over the back of his chaise, and after robbing him of his notes, watch and hat, gave him two severe cuts on his head and left him in that deplorable state in the road. The above are but two instances of hundreds of a similar nature which yearly occur

in the most public streets of the city of London. The city is infested with a still higher order of rogues, denominated pickpockets or cut-purses, who to carry on their nefarious practices garb themselves like gentlemen and introduce themselves into the most fashionable circles. Many of them, indeed, are persons who once sustained respectable characters, but who by extravagance and excesses have reduced themselves to want, and find themselves obliged at last to have recourse to pilfering and thieving.

Thus have I endeavoured to furnish the reader with the particulars of a few of the vices peculiar to a large portion of the inhabitants of the city of London. To these might be added a thousand other misdemeanors of a less criminal nature, daily practiced by striplings from the age of six to the hoary-headed of ninety. This, I assure my readers, is a picture correctly delineated and not too highly wrought, of a city famous for its magnificence, and where I was doomed to spend more than forty years of my life, and in which time pen, ink and paper would fail were I to attempt to record the various instances of misery and want that attended me and my poor devoted family.

In September, 1783, the glorious news of a definite treaty of peace having been signed between the United States and Great Britain was publicly announced in London. While on the minds of those who had been made rich by the war the unwelcomed news operated apparently like a paralytic stroke, a host of those whose views had been inimical to the cause of America and had sought refuge in England, attempted to disguise their disappointment and dejection under a veil of assumed cheerfulness. As regarded myself, I can only say that had an event so long and ardently wished for by me taken place but a few months before, I should have hailed it as the epoch of my deliverance from a state of oppression and privation that I had already too long endured.

An opportunity indeed now presented for me to return once

more to my native country after so long an absence, had I possessed the means; but such was the high price demanded for a passage and such had been my low wages and the expenses attending the support of even a small family in London, that I found myself at this time in possession of funds hardly sufficient to defray the expense of my own passage, and much less that of my wife and child. Hence the only choice left me was either to desert them, and thereby subject them, far separated from me, to the frowns of an uncharitable people, or to content myself to remain with them and partake of a portion of that wretchedness which even my presence could not avert. When the affairs of the American Government had become so far regulated as to support a Consul at the British court, I might, indeed, have availed myself individually of the opportunity which presented, of procuring a passage home at the Government's expense; but as this was a privilege that could not be extended to my wife and child, my regard for them prevented my embracing the only means provided by my country for the return of her captured soldiers and seamen.<sup>1</sup>

To make the best of my hard fortune, I became as resigned and reconciled to my situation as circumstances would admit of; flattering myself that Fortune might at some unexpected moment so far decide in my favour as to enable me to accomplish my wishes. I indeed bore my affliction with a degree of fortitude which I could hardly have believed myself possessed of. I had become an expert workman at brickmaking, at which business and at gardening I continued to work for very small wages for three or four years after the peace, but still found my prospects of a speedy return to my country by no means flattering. The peace had thrown thousands who had taken an active part in the war out of employ; London was thronged with them, who in prefer-

<sup>1</sup> He that hath wife or children hath given hostages to Fortune, for they are impediments to great enterprises, whether of virtue or of mischief.—*Bacon*.

ence to starving required no other consideration for their labour than a humble living, which had a lamentable effect in reducing the wages of the labouring class of people, who previous to this event were many of them so extremely poor as to be scarcely able to procure the necessaries of life for their impoverished families. Among this class I must rank myself, and from this period ought I to date the commencement of my greatest miseries, which never failed to attend me in a greater or less degree until that happy moment when, favoured by Providence, I was permitted once more to visit the peaceful shores of the land of my nativity.

When I first entered the city of London I was almost stunned, while my curiosity was not a little excited by what is termed the "cries of London." The streets were thronged by persons of both sexes and of every age, crying each the various articles which they were exposing for sale, or for jobs of work at their various occupations. I little then thought that this was a mode which I should be obliged myself to adopt to obtain a scanty pittance for my needy family; but such, indeed, proved to be the case. The great increase of labourers produced by the cessation of hostilities had so great an effect in the reduction of wages that the trifling consideration now allowed me by my employers for my services, in the line of business in which I had been several years engaged, was no longer an object, being insufficient to enable me to procure a humble sustenance. Having in vain sought for more profitable business, I was induced to apply to an acquaintance for instruction in the art of chair-bottoming, and which I partially obtained from him for a trifling consideration.

It was now (which was in the year 1789) that I assumed a line of business very different from that in which I had ever before been engaged. Fortunately for me I possessed strong lungs, which I found very necessary in an employment the success of which depended in a great measure in being enabled to drown the



voices of others engaged in the same occupation by my own. "Old chairs to mend" became now my constant cry through the streets of London from morning to night; and although I found my business not so profitable as I could have wished, yet it yielded a tolerable support for my family some time, and probably would have continued so to have done, had not the almost constant illness of my children rendered the expenses of my family much greater than they otherwise would have been. Thus afflicted by additional cares and expense, although I did everything in my power to avoid it, I was obliged, to alleviate the sufferings of my family, to contract some trifling debts which it was not in my power to discharge.

I now became the victim of additional miseries. I was visited by a bailiff employed by a creditor, who, seizing me with the claws of a tiger, dragged me from my poor afflicted family and inhumanly thrust me into prison. Indeed, no misery that I ever before endured equalled this—separated from those dependent on me for the necessaries of life, and placed in a situation in which it was impossible for me to afford them any relief. Fortunately for me at this melancholy moment my wife enjoyed good health, and it was to her praiseworthy exertions that her poor helpless children, as well as myself, owed our preservation from a state of starvation. This good woman had become acquainted with many who had been my customers, whom she made acquainted with my situation and the sufferings of my family, and who had the humanity to furnish me with work during my confinement. The chairs were conveyed to and from the prison by my wife [and] in this way I was enabled to support myself and to contribute something to the relief of my afflicted family. I had in vain represented to my unfeeling creditor my inability to satisfy his demands, and in vain represented to him the suffering condition of those wholly dependent on me. Unfortunately for me he proved to be one of those human beasts who, having no soul, take

pleasure in tormenting that of others, who never feel but in their own misfortunes, and never rejoice but in the afflictions of others. Of such beings, so disgraceful to human nature, I assure the reader London contains not an inconsiderable number.

After having for four months languished in a horrid prison, I was liberated therefrom a mere skeleton; the mind afflicted had tortured the body, so much is the one in subjection to the other. I returned sorrowful and dejected to my afflicted family, whom I found in very little better condition. We now from necessity took up our abode in an obscure situation near Moorfields, where by my constant application to business I succeeded in earning daily a humble pittance for my family, barely sufficient, however, to satisfy the cravings of nature; and to add to my afflictions some one of my family was almost constantly indisposed.

However wretched my situation, there were many others at this period with whom I was particularly acquainted, whose sufferings were greater, if possible, than my own, and whom want and misery drove to the commission of crimes that in any other situation they would probably not have been guilty of. Such was the case of the unfortunate Bellamy,\* who was capitally convicted and executed for a crime which distresses in his family, almost unexampled, had in a moment of despair compelled him to commit. He was one of those who had seen better days, was once a commissioned officer in the army, but being unfortunate, he was obliged to quit the service to avoid the horrors of a prison, and was thrown on the world without a single penny or a single friend. The distresses of his family were such that they were obliged to live for a considerable time deprived of all sustenance except what they could derive from scanty and precarious meals of potatoes and milk. In this situation his unfortunate wife was confined in

\* At Dublin, Nov. 10, 1802, Thomas Edward Bellamy, an officer in the Hampshire militia, charged with forging a £30 bill on Messrs. Cox and Greenwood, army agents in London; the jury returned a verdict of guilty.—*Annual Register* 1802, v. 44, p. 463.

childbed. Lodging in an obscure garret she was destitute of every species of those conveniences almost indispensable with females in her condition, being herself without clothes, and to procure a covering for her new-born infant all their resources were exhausted. In this situation his wife and children must inevitably have starved, were it not for the loan of five shillings, which he walked from London to Blackheath to borrow. At his trial he made a solemn appeal to Heaven as to the truth of every particular as above stated, and that so far from wishing to exaggerate a single fact, he had suppressed many more instances of calamity scarcely to be paralleled; that after the disgrace brought upon himself by this single transaction life could not be a boon he would be anxious to solicit, but that nature pleaded in his breast for a deserving wife and helpless child. All, however, was ineffectual—he was condemned and executed pursuant to his sentence.

I have yet one or two more melancholy instances of the effects of famine to record, the first of which happened within a mile of my then miserable habitation. A poor widow woman, who had been left destitute with five small children and who had been driven to the most awful extremities by hunger, overpowered at length by the painful cries of her wretched offspring for a morsel of bread, in a fit of despair rushed into the shop of a baker in the neighbourhood, and seizing a loaf of bread bore it off to the relief of her starving family. While in the act of dividing it among them the baker (who had pursued her) entered and charged her with the theft. The charge she did not deny, but plead the starving condition of her wretched family in palliation of the crime. The baker, noticing a platter on the table containing a quantity of roasted meat, pointed to it as a proof that she could not have been driven to such an extremity by hunger; but his surprise may be better imagined than described, when being requested by the half-distracted mother to approach and inspect more closely the contents of the platter, to find it to consist of the remains of a

roasted *dog*—which she informed him had been her only food and that of her poor children for the three preceding days! The baker, struck with so shocking a proof of the poverty and distress of the wretched family, humanely contributed to their relief until they were admitted into the hospital.

I was not personally acquainted with the family, but I well knew one who was, and who communicated to me the following melancholy particulars of its wretched situation, and with which I now present my readers as another proof of the deplorable situation of the poor in England after the close of the American war. The minister of a parish was sent for to attend the funeral of a deceased person in his neighbourhood. Being conducted to the apartment which contained the corpse (and which was the only one improved \* by the wretched family), he found it so low as to be unable to stand upright in it. In a dark corner of the room stood a three-legged stool, which supported a coffin of rough boards which contained the body of the wretched mother, who had the day previous expired in labour for the want of assistance! The father was sitting on a little stool over a few coals of fire, endeavouring to keep the infant warm in his bosom. Five of his seven children, half-naked, were asking their father for a piece of bread, while another about three years old was standing over the corpse of his mother and crying, as he was wont to do, "Take me, mammy; take me, mammy!" "Mammy is asleep," said one of his sisters, with tears in her eyes; "mammy is asleep, Johnny; don't cry, the good nurse has gone to beg you some bread, and will soon return." In a few minutes after, an old woman, crooked with age and clothed in tatters, came into the room with a two-penny loaf in her hand, and after heaving a sigh, calmly sat down and divided the loaf as far as it would go, among the poor half-famished children; and which, she observed, was the only food they had tasted for the last twenty-four hours! By the

\* Occupied.

kind interposition of the worthy divine, a contribution was immediately raised for the relief of this wretched family.

I might add many more melancholy instances of the extreme poverty and distress of the wretched poor of London, and with which I was personally acquainted; but the foregoing, it is presumed, will be sufficient to satisfy the poorest class of inhabitants of America that, if deprived of the superfluities, so long as they can obtain the necessaries of life they ought not to murmur, but have reason to thank the Almighty that they were born Americans. That one-half the world knows not how the other half lives, is a common and just observation. Complaints and murmurs are frequent, I find, among those of the inhabitants of this highly favoured country, who are not only blessed with the liberty and means of procuring for themselves and their families the necessaries and comforts, but even many of the luxuries of life. They complain of poverty, yet never knew what it was to be really poor. Having never either experienced or witnessed such scenes of distress and woe as I have described, they even suppose their imaginary wants and privations equal to those of almost any of the human race!

Let those of my countrymen who thus imagine themselves miserable amid plenty, cross the Atlantic and visit the miserable habitations of real and unaffected woe—if their hearts are not destitute of feeling they will return satisfied to their own peaceful and happy shores and pour forth the ejaculations of gratitude to that universal parent who has given them abundance and exempted them from the thousand ills under the pressure of which a great portion of his children drag the load of life. Permit me to enquire of such unreasonable murmurers—have you compared your situation and circumstances, of which you so much complain, with that of those of your fellow-creatures who are unable to earn by their hard labour even a scanty pittance for their starving families? Have you compared your situation and circumstances with

that of those who have hardly ever seen the sun, but live confined in lead mines, stone quarries and coal-pits?

Before you call yourselves wretched, take a survey of the jails in Europe, in which wretched beings who have been driven to the commission of crimes by starvation, or unfortunate and honest debtors who have been torn from their impoverished families, are doomed to pine. So far from uttering unreasonable complaints, the hearts of my highly favoured countrymen ought rather to be filled with gratitude to that Being by whose assistance they have been enabled to avert so many of the miseries of life so peculiar to a portion of the oppressed of Europe at the present day; and who after groaning themselves for some time under the yoke of foreign tyranny, succeeded in emancipating themselves from slavery and are now blessed with the sweets of liberty and the undisturbed enjoyment of their natural rights. Britain, imperious Britain, who once boasted the freedom of her government and the invincible power of her arms, now finds herself reduced to the humiliating necessity of receiving lessons of liberty from those whom till late she despised as slaves; while our own country, on the other hand, like a phoenix from her ashes, having emerged from a long, expensive and bloody war, and established a constitution upon the broad and immovable basis of national equality, now promises to become the permanent residence of peace, liberty, science and national felicity. But to return to the tale of my own sufferings:

While hundreds were daily becoming the wretched victims of hunger and starvation, I was enabled by my industry to obtain a morsel each day for my family; although this morsel, which was to be divided among four, would many times have proved insufficient to have satisfied the hunger of one, I seldom ever failed from morning to night to cry "Old chairs to mend" through the principal streets of the city, but many times with very little success. If I obtained four chairs to re-bottom in the course of one day, I

considered myself fortunate indeed, but instances of such good luck were very rare; it was more frequent that I did not obtain a single one; after crying the whole day until I made myself hoarse, I was obliged to return to my poor family at night empty-handed.

So many at one time engaged in the same business that, had I not resorted to other means, my family must inevitably have starved. While crying "Old chairs to mend," I collected all the old rags, bits of paper, nails and broken glass which I could find in the streets, and which I deposited in a bag which I carried with me for that purpose. These produced me a trifle, and that trifle when other resources failed procured me a morsel of bread or a few pounds of potatoes for my poor wife and children. Yet I murmured not at the dispensation of the Supreme Arbiter of allotments, which had assigned to me so humble a line of duty, although I could not have believed once that I should ever have been brought to such a state of humiliating distress as would have required such means to alleviate it.

In February, 1783, war was declared by Great Britain against the republic of France, and although war is a calamity that ought always to be regretted by friends of humanity, as thousands are undoubtedly thereby involved in misery, yet no event could have happened at that time productive of so much benefit to me as this! It was the means of draining the country of those who had once been soldiers and who, thrown out of employ by the Peace, demanded a sum so trifling for their services as to cause a reduction in the wages of the poor labouring class of people to a sum insufficient to procure the necessaries of life for their families. This evil was now removed; the old soldiers preferred an employment more in character of themselves to doing the drudgery of the city; great inducements were held out to them to enlist, and the army was not long retarded in its operations for the want of recruits. My prospects in being enabled to earn something to satisfy the calls of nature became now more flattering; the great number that

had been employed during the Peace in a business similar to my own were now reduced to one-half, which enabled me to obtain such an extra number of jobs at chair-mending that I no longer found it necessary to collect the scrapings of the streets as I had been obliged to do for many months past. I was now enabled to purchase for my family two or three pounds of fresh meat each week—an article to which (with one or two exceptions) we had been strangers for more than a year—having subsisted principally on potatoes, oatmeal bread and salt fish, and sometimes, but rarely, however, were enabled to treat ourselves to a little skim milk.

Had not other afflictions attended me, I should not have had much cause to complain of very extraordinary hardships or privations from this period until the conclusion of the war in 1817.<sup>1</sup> My family had increased, and to increase my cares there was scarcely a week passed but some one of them was seriously indisposed. Of ten children of which I was the father, I had the misfortune to bury seven under five years of age, and two more after they had arrived to the age of twenty. My last and only child now living it pleased the Almighty to spare to me, to administer help and comfort to his poor afflicted parent, and without whose assistance I should, so far from having been enabled once more to visit the land of my nativity, ere this have paid the debt of nature in a foreign land, and that, too, by a death no less horrible than that of starvation.

As my life was unattended with any very extraordinary circumstance (except the one just mentioned) from the commencement of the war until the re-establishment of monarchy in France and the cessation of hostilities on the part of Great Britain in 1817, I shall commence on the narration of my unparalleled sufferings from the latter period until that when by the kind interposition of Providence I was enabled finally to obtain a passage

<sup>1</sup> It is singular that Potter makes no allusion whatever to the War of 1812, though he must have been deeply interested in his country's second war for independence.



to my native country, and to bid an adieu, and I hope and trust a final one, to that island where I had endured a complication of miseries beyond the power of description.

The peace produced similar effects to that of 1783. Thousands were thrown out of employ, and the streets of London thronged with soldiers seeking means to earn a humble subsistence. The cry of "Old chairs to mend" (and that, too, at a very reduced price) was reiterated through the streets of London by numbers who but the month before were at Waterloo fighting the battles of their country—which so seriously affected my business in this line that to obtain food (and that of the most humble kind) for my family, I was obliged once more to have recourse to the collecting of scraps of rags, paper, glass and such other articles of however trifling value that I could find in the streets.

It was at this distressing period that, in consequence of the impossibility of so great a number who had been discharged from the Service procuring a livelihood by honest means, that instances of thefts and daring robberies increased throughout Great Britain threefold. Bands of highwaymen and robbers hovered about the vicinity of London in numbers which almost defied suppression. Many were taken and executed, or transported; but this seemed to render the rest only the more desperately bold and cruel, while housebreaking and assassination were daily perpetrated with new arts and outrages in the very capital. Nor was the starving condition of the honest poor, who were to be met with at all times of day and in every street, seeking something to appease their hunger, less remarkable. Unable to procure by any means within their power sustenance sufficient to support nature, some actually became the victims of absolute starvation, as the following melancholy instance will show. A poor man exhausted by want dropped down in the street. Those who were passing, unacquainted with the frequency of such melancholy events, at first thought him in-

toxicated; but after languishing half an hour, he expired. On the following day an inquest was held on the body, and the verdict of the jury not giving satisfaction to the Coroner, they adjourned to the next day. In the interim two respectable surgeons were engaged to open the body, in which not a particle of nutriment was to be found except a little yellow substance supposed to be grass, or some crude vegetable, which the poor man had swallowed to appease the cravings of nature. This lamentable proof confirmed the opinion of the jury that he died for want of the necessaries of life, and [they] gave their verdict accordingly.

Miserable as was the fate of this man and that of many others, mine was but little better and would ultimately have been the same, had it not been for the assistance afforded me by my only remaining child, a lad but seven years of age. I had now arrived to an advanced age of life, and although possessing an extraordinary constitution for one of my years, yet by my incessant labours to obtain subsistence for my family I brought on myself a severe fit of illness, which confined me three weeks to my chamber, in which time my only sustenance was the produce of a few half-pennies which my poor wife and little son had been able to earn each day by disposing of matches of their own make, and in collecting and disposing of the articles of small value of which I have before made mention, which were to be found thinly scattered in the streets. In three weeks it was the will of Providence so far to restore to me my strength as to enable me once more to move abroad in search of something to support nature.

The tenement which I at this time rented and which was occupied by my family, was a small and wretched apartment of a garret, for which I had obligated myself to pay sixpence per day, which was to be paid at the close of every week; and in case of failure (agreeable to the laws or customs of the land) my furniture was liable to be seized. In consequence of my illness and other mis-

fortunes, I fell six weeks in arrears for rent; and having returned one evening with my wife and son from the performance of our daily task, my kind readers may judge what my feelings must have been to find our room stripped of every article, of however trifling value, that it contained.

Alas, oh heavens, to what a state of wretchedness were we now reduced! If there was anything wanting to complete our misery, this additional drop to the cup of our afflictions more than sufficed. Although the real value of all that they had taken from me or rather, robbed me of, would not, if publicly disposed of, have produced a sum exceeding five dollars, yet it was our all, except the few tattered garments that we had on our backs, and were serviceable and all-important to us in our impoverished situation. Not an article of bedding of any kind was left us on which to repose at night, or a chair or stool on which we could rest our wearied limbs, but as destitute as we were and naked as they had left our dreary apartment, we had no other abiding place.

With a few half-pennies which were jointly our hard earnings of that day I purchased a peck of coal and a few pounds of potatoes; which, while the former furnished us with a little fire, the latter served for a moment to appease our hunger. By a poor family in an adjoining room I was obliged with the loan of a wooden bench, which served as seat and a table from which we partook of our homely fare. In this woeful situation, hovering over a few half-consumed coals, we spent a sleepless night. The day's dawn brought additional afflictions—my poor wife, who had until this period borne her troubles without a sigh or a murmur, and had passed through hardships and sorrows which nothing but the Supreme Giver of patience and fortitude and her perfect confidence in Him could have enabled her to sustain, yet so severe an unexpected stroke as the last she could not withstand. I found her in the morning gloomy and dejected, and so extremely feeble as to be hardly able to descend the stairs.

We left our miserable habitation in the morning with hopes that the wretched spectacle that we presented, weak and emaciated as we were, would move some to pity and induce them to impart that relief which our situation so much required. It would be, however, almost endless to recount the many rebuffs we met with in our attempts to crave assistance. Some few, indeed, were more merciful, and whatever their opinion might be of the cause of our misery, the distress they saw us in excited their charity, and for their own sakes were induced to contribute a trifle to our wants. We alternately happened among savages and Christians, but even the latter, too much influenced by appearances, were very sparing of their bounty.

With the small trifle that had been charitably bestowed on us, we returned at night to our wretched dwelling, which stripped as it had been could promise us but little more than a shelter, and where we spent the night very much as the preceding one. Such was the debilitated state of my poor wife the ensuing morning, produced by excessive hunger and fatigue, as to render it certain that sinking under the weight of misery, the hand of death, in mercy to her, was about to release her from her long and unparalleled sufferings. I should be afraid of exciting too painful sensations in the minds of my readers were I to attempt to describe my feelings at this moment, and to paint in all their horror the miseries which afterwards attended me; although so numerous had been my afflictions that it seemed impossible for any new calamity to be capable of augmenting them. Men accustomed to vicissitudes are not soon dejected, but there are trials which human nature alone cannot surmount—indeed, to such a state of wretchedness was I now reduced, that had it not been for my suffering family life would have been no longer desirable. The attendance that the helpless situation of my poor wife now demanded it was not within my power to afford her, as early the next day I was reluctantly driven by hunger abroad in search of something that might serve to contribute to our relief. I left my unfortunate companion attended by no other person but

our little son, destitute of food and fuel, and stretched on an armful of straw, which I had been so fortunate as to provide myself with the day preceding. The whole produce of my labours this day (which I may safely say was the most melancholy one of my life) amounted to no more than one shilling, which I laid out to the best advantage possible in the purchase of a few of the necessaries which the situation of my sick companion most required.

I ought to have mentioned that previous to this melancholy period when most severely afflicted, I had been two or three times driven to the necessity of making application to the Overseers of the Poor of the Parish in which I resided, for admittance into the almshouse; but never with any success, having always been put off by them with some evasive answer or frivolous pretence; sometimes charged by them with being an impostor and that laziness, more than real want, had induced me to make the application. At other times I was told that, being an American born, I had no lawful claim on the government of that country for support; that I ought to have made application to the American Consul for assistance, whose business it was to assist such of his countrymen whose situation required it.

But such now was my distress in consequence of the extreme illness of my wife, that I must receive that aid so indispensably necessary at this important crisis, or subject myself to witness a scene no less distressing than that of my poor, wretched wife actually perishing for the want of that care and nourishment which it was not in my power to afford her! Thus situated, I was induced to renew my application to the Overseer for assistance, representing to him the deplorable situation of my family, who were actually starving for the want of that sustenance which it was not in my power to procure for them; and what I thought would most probably affect his feelings, described to him the peculiar and distressed situation of my wife, the hour of whose dissolution was apparently fast ap-

proaching. But I soon found that I was addressing one who possessed a heart callous to the feelings of humanity—one whose feelings were not to be touched by a representation of the greatest misery with which human nature could be afflicted. The same cruel observations were made as before; that I was a vile impostor who was seeking by imposition to obtain that support in England which my own country had withheld from me: that the American Yankees had fought for and obtained their independence, and yet were not independent enough to support their own poor: that Great Britain would find enough to do, was she to afford relief to every d——d Yankee vagabond that should apply for it! Fortunately for this abusive British scoundrel, I possessed not now that bodily strength and activity which I could once boast of, or the villain (whether within His Majesty's dominions or not) should have received on the spot a proof of "Yankee independence" for his insolence.

Failing in my attempt to obtain the assistance which the lamentable situation of my wife required, I had recourse to other means. I waited on two or three gentlemen in my neighbourhood who had been represented to me as persons of humanity, and entreated them to visit my wretched dwelling and to satisfy themselves by ocular demonstration, of the state of my wretchedness, especially that of my dying companion. They complied with my request and were introduced by me to a scene which for misery and distress they declared surpassed everything that they had ever before witnessed. They accompanied me immediately to one in whom was invested the principal government of the poor of the parish, and represented to him the scene of human misery which they had been an eye witness to; whereupon an order was issued to have my wife conveyed to the hospital, which was immediately done, and where she was comfortably provided for. But, alas, the relief which her situation had so much required had been too long deferred—her deprivation and sufferings had been too great to admit of her being now restored

to her former state of health, or relieved by anything that could be administered.

After her removal to the hospital she lingered a few days in a state of perfect insensibility and then closed her eyes forever on a world where for many years she had been the unhappy subject of almost constant affliction.

I felt very sensibly the irreparable loss of one who had been my companion in adversity as well as in prosperity, and when blessed with health had afforded me by her industry that assistance without which the sufferings of our poor children would have been greater, if possible, than what they were. My situation was now truly a lonely one, bereaved of my wife and all my children except one, who, although but little more than seven years of age was a child of that sprightliness and activity as to possess himself with a perfect knowledge of the chair-bottoming business, and by which he earned not only enough (when work could be obtained) to furnish himself with food, but contributed much to the relief of his surviving parent when confined by illness and infirmity.

We continued to improve <sup>1</sup> the apartment from which my wife had been removed, until I was so fortunate as to be able to rent a ready-furnished apartment (as it was termed) at four shillings and sixpence a week. Apartments of this kind are not uncommon in London, and are intended to accommodate poor families, situated as we were, who had been so unfortunate as to be stripped of everything but the cloathes on their backs by their unfeeling landlords. These "ready-furnished" rooms were nothing but miserable apartments in garrets, and contain but few more conveniences than what many of our common prisons in America afford—a bunk of straw, with two or three old blankets, a couple of chairs and a rough table about three feet square, with an article or two of ironware in which to cook our victuals (if we should be

<sup>1</sup> Occupy or use.

so fortunate as to obtain any), were the contents of the ready-furnished apartment that we were now about to occupy; but even with these few conveniences, it was comparatively a palace to the one we had for several weeks past improved.

When my health would permit, I seldom failed to visit daily the most public streets of the city and from morning to night cry for old chairs to mend—accompanied by my son Thomas, with a bundle of flags.<sup>2</sup> If we were so fortunate as to obtain a job of work more than we could complete in the day, with the permission of the owner I would convey the chairs on my back to my humble dwelling, and with the assistance of my little son improve the evening to complete the work, which would produce us a few half-pennies to purchase something for our breakfast the next morning. But it was very seldom that instances of this kind occurred, as it was more frequently the case that after crying for old chairs to mend the whole day, we were obliged to return hungry and weary, and without a single half-penny in our pockets, to our humble dwelling, where we were obliged to fast until the succeeding day. And, indeed, there were some instances in which we were compelled to fast two or three days successively, without being able to procure a single job of work. The rent I had obligated myself to pay every night, and frequently when our hunger was such as hardly to be endured, I was obliged to reserve the few pennies that I was possessed of to apply to this purpose.

In our most starving condition, when every other plan failed, my little son would adopt the expedient of sweeping the public causeways (leading from one walk to the other), where he would labour the whole day with the expectation of receiving no other reward than what the generosity of gentlemen who had occasion to cross would induce them to bestow in charity, and which seldom amounted to more than a few pennies. Sometimes the poor boy would toil in this way the whole day without being so fortunate

<sup>2</sup> Rushes or rattans.



as to receive a single half-penny. It was then he would return home sorrowful and dejected, and while he attempted to conceal his own hunger, with tears in his eyes, would lament his hard fortune in not being able to obtain something to appease mine. While he was thus employed I remained at home, but not idle, being as busily engaged in making matches, with which, when he returned home empty-handed, we were obliged, as fatigued as we were, to visit the markets to expose for sale, and where we were obliged sometimes to tarry until eleven o'clock at night before we could meet with a single purchaser. Having one stormy night of a Saturday visited the market with my son for this purpose, and after exposing ourselves to the chilling rain until past ten o'clock without being able, either of us, to sell a single match, I advised the youth (being thinly clad) to return home—feeling disposed to tarry myself a while longer in hopes that better success might attend me; as having already fasted one day and night, it was indispensably necessary that I should obtain something to appease our hunger the succeeding day (Sunday), or, what seemed impossible, to endure longer its torments! I remained until eleven, the hour at which the market closed, and yet had met with no better success. It is impossible to describe the sensation of despondency which overwhelmed me at this moment. I now considered it as certain that I must return home with nothing wherewith to satisfy our craving appetites, and with my mind filled with the most heartrending reflections, I was about to return, when Heaven seemed pleased to interpose in my behalf, and to send relief when I little expected it. Passing a beef stall, I attracted the notice of the butcher, who, viewing me probably as I was, a miserable object of pity emaciated by long fastings and clad in tattered garments from which the water was fast dripping, and judging no doubt from my appearance that on no one could charity be more properly bestowed, he threw into my basket a beef's heart, with the request that I would depart with it imme-

diately for my home, if any I had. I will not attempt to describe the joy that I felt on this occasion in so unexpectedly meeting with that relief which my situation so much required. I hastened home with a much lighter heart than what I had anticipated, and when I arrived, the sensations of joy exhibited by my little son on viewing the prize that I bore produced effects as various as extraordinary; he wept, then laughed and danced with transport.

The reader must suppose that while I found it so extremely difficult to earn enough to preserve us from starvation, I had little to spare for cloathing and other necessities; and that this was really my situation I think no one will doubt, when I positively declare that to such extremities was I driven that, being unable to pay a barber for shaving me, I was obliged to adopt the expedient for more than two years of clipping my beard as close as possible with a pair of scissors which I kept for that purpose.<sup>1</sup> As strange and laughable as the circumstance may appear to some, I assure the reader that I state facts and exaggerate nothing. As regarded our clothes I can say no more than that they were the best that we could procure, and were such as persons in our situation were obliged to wear. They served to conceal our nakedness, but would have proved insufficient to have protected our bodies from the inclemency of the weather of a colder climate. Such, indeed, was sometimes our miserable appearance, clad in tattered garments, that while engaged in our employment in crying for old chairs to mend, we not only attracted the notice of many, but there were instances in which a few half-pennies unsolicited were bestowed on us in charity. An instance of this kind happened one day, as I was passing through Threadneedle street; a gentleman, perceiving by the appearance of the shoes I wore that they were about to

<sup>1</sup> This may seem absurd to readers of the twentieth century, but at that time not a man in England wore hair on his face, and anyone appearing with such was at once known for a foreigner and became an object of popular attention of a disagreeable sort. —(Ed.)

quit me, put half a crown in my hand and bid me go and cry, "Old *shoes* to mend."

In long and gloomy winter evenings, when unable to furnish myself with any other light than that emitted by a little fire of seacoal, I would attempt to drive away melancholy by amusing my son with an account of my native country, and of the many blessings there enjoyed by even the poorest class of people; of their fair fields producing a regular supply of bread; their convenient houses, to which they could repair after the toils of the day, to partake of the fruits of their labour, safe from the storms and the cold, and where they could lay down their heads to rest without any to molest them or to make them afraid. Nothing could have been better calculated to excite animation in the mind of the poor child than an account so flattering of a country which had given birth to his father, and to which he had received my repeated assurances he should accompany me as soon as an opportunity should present. After expressing his fears that the happy day was yet far distant, with a deep sigh he would exclaim, "Would to God it was to-morrow!"

About a year after the decease of my wife I was taken extremely ill, insomuch that at one time my life was despaired of, and had it not been for the friendless and lonely situation in which such an event would have placed my son, I should have welcomed the hour of my dissolution and viewed it as a consummation rather to be wished than dreaded; for so great had been my sufferings of mind and body, and the miseries to which I was still exposed, that life had really become a burthen to me. Indeed, I think it would have been difficult to have found on the face of the earth a being more wretched than I had been for the three years past.

During my illness my only friend on earth was my son, Thomas, who did everything to alleviate my wants within the power of his

age to do; sometimes by crying for old chairs to mend (for he had become as expert a workman at this business as his father) and sometimes by sweeping the causeways and by making and selling matches he succeeded in earning each day a trifle sufficient to procure for me and himself a humble sustenance. When I had so far recovered as to be able to creep abroad, and the youth had been so fortunate as to obtain a good job, I would accompany him, although very feeble, and assist him in conveying the chairs home. It was on such occasions that my dear child would manifest his tenderness and affection for me by insisting, if there were four chairs, that I should carry but one and he would carry the remaining three, or in proportion of a greater or less number.

From the moment that I had informed him of the many blessings enjoyed by my countrymen of every class, I was almost constantly urged by my son to apply to the American Consul for a passage. It was in vain that I represented to him that if such an application was attended with success and the opportunity should be improved by me, it must cause our separation, perhaps forever, as he would not be permitted to accompany me at the expense of Government.

"Never mind me," he would reply; "do not, father, suffer any more on my account. If you can only succeed in obtaining a passage to a country where you can enjoy the blessings that you have described to me I may be so fortunate as to meet with an opportunity to join you; and if not, it will be a consolation to me, whatever my afflictions may be, to think that yours have ceased!" My ardent wish to return to America was not less than that of my son, but I could not bear the thoughts of a separation; of leaving him behind exposed to all the miseries peculiar to the friendless poor of that country. He was a child of my old age and from whom I had received too many proofs of his love and regard for me not to feel that parental affection for him to which his amiable disposition entitled him.

I was indeed unacquainted with the place of residence of the American Consul. I had made frequent inquiries, but no one that could inform me correctly where he might be found; but so anxious was my son that I should spend the remnant of my days in that country where I should receive (if nothing more) a Christian burial at my decease, and bid farewell to a land where I had spent so great a portion of my life in sorrow, and many years had endured the lingering tortures of protracted famine, that he ceased not to enquire of everyone with whom he was acquainted, until he obtained the wished-for information. Having learned the place of residence of the American Consul, and fearful of the consequences of delay, he would give me no peace until I promised him that I would accompany him there the succeeding day, if my strength would admit of it; for although I had partially recovered from a severe fit of sickness, yet I was still so weak and feeble as to be scarcely able to walk.

My son did not fail to remind me early the next morning of my promise, and to gratify him more than with an expectation of meeting with much success, I set out with him, feeble as I was, for the Consul's.<sup>1</sup>

The distance was about two miles, and before I had succeeded in reaching half the way I had wished myself a dozen times safe home again, and had it not been for the strong persuasion of my son to the contrary, I certainly should have returned. I was never before so sensible of the effects of my long sufferings, which had produced that degree of bodily weakness and debility as to leave me scarcely strength sufficient to move without the assistance of my son, who, when he found me reeling or halting through

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Aspinwall (1786-1876) was American Consul at London, 1815-53—a tenure of office only equalled by that our Consul Horatio Sprague, at Gibraltar. He was Major and Colonel of the Ninth Infantry during the War of 1812, and lost one arm at the sortie from Fort Erie.

weakness, would support me until I had gained sufficient strength to proceed.

Although the distance was but two miles, yet such was the state of my weakness that, although we started early in the morning, it was half-past three o'clock when we reached the Consul's office; when I was so much exhausted as to be obliged to ascend the steps on my hands and knees. Fortunately, we found the Consul in, and on my addressing him and acquainting him with the object of my visit, he seemed at first unwilling to credit the fact that I was an American born; but after interrogating me some time as to the place of my nativity, the cause which first brought me to England, &c., he seemed to be more satisfied. He, however, observed, on being informed that the lad who accompanied me was my son, that he could procure a passage for me, but not for him—as being born in England the American government would consider him a British subject, and under no obligation to defray the expense of his passage; and as regarded myself, he observed that he had his doubts, so aged and infirm as I appeared to be, whether I should live to reach America if I should attempt it. I cannot say that I was much surprised at the observations of the Consul, as they exactly agreed with what I had anticipated; and as anxious as I then felt to visit once more my native country, I felt determined not to attempt it unless I could be accompanied by my son, and expressed myself to this effect to the Consul. The poor lad appeared nearly overcome with grief when he saw me preparing to return without being able to effect my object. Indeed, so greatly was he affected and such the sorrow that he exhibited, that he attracted the notice (and I believe I may add, the pity,) of the Consul, who after making some few enquiries as regarded his disposition, age, &c., observed that he could furnish the lad with a passage at his own expense, which he should have no objection to do if I would consent to his living with a connexion of his (the Consul's) on his arrival in America. "But," (continued he) "in

such a case you must be a while separated, for it would be imprudent for you to attempt the passage until you have gained more strength. I will pay your board where, by better living than you have been latterly accustomed to, you may have a chance to recruit—but your son must take passage on board the *London Packet*, which sails for Boston the day after to-morrow.”

Although but a few moments previous my son would have thought no sacrifice too great that would have enabled us to effect our object in obtaining passages to America, yet when he found that instead of himself I was to be left for awhile behind, he appeared at some loss how to determine. But on being assured by the Consul that if my life was spared I should soon join him, he consented; and being furnished by the Consul with a few necessary articles of cloathing, I the next day accompanied him on board the packet which was to convey him to America—and after giving him the best advice that I was capable of as regarded his behaviour and deportment, while on his passage and on his arrival in America, I took my leave of him and saw him not again until I met him on the wharf on my arrival at Boston.

When I parted with the Consul he presented me with half a crown, and directions where to apply for board; it was at a public inn, where I found many American seamen who, like myself, were boarded there at the Consul's expense until passages could be obtained for them to America. I was treated by them with much civility, and by hearing them daily account their various and remarkable adventures, as well as by relating my own, I passed my time more agreeably than what I probably should have done in other society.

In eight weeks I was so far recruited by good living as in the opinion of the Consul to be able to endure the fatigues of a passage to my native country, and which was procured for me on board the ship *Criterion*, bound to New York. We set sail on the

fifth of April, 1823, and after a passage of forty-two days arrived safe at our port of destination. After having experienced in a foreign land so much ill-treatment from those from whom I could expect no mercy, and for no other fault than that of being an American, I could not but flatter myself that when I bid adieu to that country I should no longer be the subject of unjust persecution, or have occasion to complain of ill-treatment from those whose duty it was to afford me protection. But the sad reverse which I experienced while on board the *Criterion* convinced me of the incorrectness of my conclusions. For my country's sake I am happy to have it in my power to say that the crew of this ship was not composed altogether of Americans—there was a mixture of all nations, and among them some so vile and destitute of every humane principle as to delight in nothing so much as to sport with the infirmities of one whose grey locks ought at least to have protected him. By these unfeeling wretches, who deserve not the name of sailors, I was not only most shamefully ill-used on the passage, but was robbed of some necessary articles of clothing which had been charitably bestowed on me by the American Consul.

We arrived in the harbour of New York about midnight; and such were the pleasing sensations produced by the reflection that on the morrow I should be indulged with the privilege of walking once more on American ground after an absence of almost fifty years, and that but a short distance now separated me from my dear son, that it was in vain that I attempted to close my eyes to sleep. Never was the morning's dawn so cheerfully welcomed as by me. I solicited and obtained the permission of the captain to be early set on shore, on reaching which I did not forget to offer up my unfeigned thanks to that mighty Being who had not only sustained me during my heavy afflictions abroad, but had finally restored me to my native country. The pleasure that I enjoyed in viewing the streets thronged by those who, although I could not claim as acquaintances, I could greet as my countrymen, was un-



bounded. I felt a regard for almost every object that met my eye because it was American.

Great as was my joy on finding myself once more among my countrymen, I felt not a little impatient for the arrival of the happy moment when I should be able to meet my son. Agreeable to the orders which I [had] received from the American Consul, I applied to the Customs House in New York for a passage from thence to Boston, with which I was provided on board a regular packet which sailed the morning ensuing. In justice to the captain, I must say that I was treated by him, as well as by all on board, with much civility. We arrived at the Long Wharf in Boston after a short and pleasant passage. I had been informed by the Consul, previous to leaving London, of the name of the gentleman with whom my son probably lived, and a fellow-passenger on board the packet was so good as to call on and inform him of my arrival. In less than fifteen minutes after receiving the information my son met me on the wharf! Reader, you will not believe it possible for me to describe my feelings correctly at this joyful moment. If you are a parent you may have some conception of them, but a faint one, however, unless you and an only beloved child have been placed in a similar situation.

After acquainting myself with the state of my boy's health, &c., my next enquiry was whether he found the country as it had been described by me, and how he esteemed it. "Well, extremely well," was his reply. "Since my arrival I have fared like a prince; I have meat every day and have feasted on American puddings and pies, such as you used to tell me about, until I have become almost sick of them!" I was immediately conducted by him to the house of the gentleman with whom he lived, and by whom I was treated with much hospitality.

In the afternoon of the day succeeding, by the earnest request of my son, I visited Bunker Hill, which he had a curiosity to view,

having heard it so frequently spoken of by me while in London as the place where the memorable battle was fought in which I received my wounds.

I continued in Boston about a fortnight, and then set out on foot to visit once more my native State. My son accompanied me as far as Roxbury, when I was obliged reluctantly to part with him, and proceeded myself no further on my journey that day than Jamaica Plain, where at a public house I tarried all night. From thence I started early the next morning and reached Providence about five o'clock in the afternoon and obtained lodgings at a public inn in High street.

It may not be improper here to acquaint my readers that, as I had left my father possessed of very considerable property, of which at his decease I thought myself entitled to a portion equal to that of the other children, which (as my father was very economical in the management of his affairs) I knew could not amount to a very inconsiderable sum, it was to obtain this, if possible, that I became extremely anxious to visit immediately the place of my nativity. Accordingly, the day after I arrived in Providence, I hastened to Cranston, to seek my connexions, if any were to be found, and if not, to seek among the most aged of the inhabitants some one who had not forgotten me and who might be able to furnish me with the sought-for information. But, alas! too soon were blasted my hopeful expectations of finding something in reserve for me that might have afforded me a humble support the few remaining years of my life. It was by a distant connexion that I was informed that my brothers had many years since removed to a distant part of the country; that having credited a rumour in circulation of my death, at the decease of my father [they] had disposed of the real estate of which he died possessed and had divided the proceeds equally among themselves! This was another instance of adverse fortune that I had not antici-

pated. It was, indeed, a circumstance so foreign from my mind that I felt myself for the first time unhappy since my return to my native country, and even believed myself now doomed to endure among my own countrymen (for whose liberties I had fought and bled) miseries similar to those that had attended me for many years in Europe.

With these gloomy forebodings, I returned to Providence and contracted for board with the gentleman at whose house I had lodged the first night of my arrival in town, and to whom, for the kind treatment that I have received from him and his family, I shall feel till death under the deepest obligations that gratitude can dictate; for I can truly say of him that I was a stranger and he took me in, I was hungry and naked and he fed and clothed me.

As I had never received any remuneration for services rendered and hardships endured in the cause of my country, I was now obliged, as my last resort, to petition Congress to be included in that number of the few surviving soldiers of the Revolution, for whose services they had been pleased to grant pensions—and I would to God that I could add, for the honour of my country, that the application met with its deserving success—but, although accompanied by the deposition of a respectable gentleman (which deposition I have thought proper to annex to my narrative) satisfactorily confirming every fact as therein stated—yet on no other principle than that *I was absent from the country when the pension law passed*, my petition was REJECTED! Reader, I have been for thirty years (as you will perceive by what I have stated in the foregoing pages) subject in a foreign country to almost all the miseries with which poor human nature is capable of being afflicted, yet in no one instance did I ever feel so great a degree of depression of spirits as when the fate of my petition was announced to me! I love too well the country which gave me birth, and entertain too high a respect for those employed in its government, to reproach them with ingratitude; yet it is my sincere

prayer that this strange and unprecedented circumstance of withholding from me that reward which they have so generally bestowed on others may never be told in Europe, or published in the streets of London, lest it reach the ears of some who had the effrontery to declare to me personally that for the active part that I had taken in the "rebellious war" misery and starvation would ultimately be my reward!

To conclude—although I may be again unfortunate in a renewal of my application to Government for that reward to which my services so justly entitle me, yet I feel thankful that I am privileged, after enduring so much, to spend the remainder of my days among those who, I am confident, are possessed of too much humanity to see me suffer; which I am sensible I owe to the Divine goodness which graciously condescended to support me under my numerous afflictions and finally enabled me to return to my native country in the seventy-ninth year of my age. For this I return unfeigned thanks to the Almighty, and hope to give, during the remainder of my life, convincing testimonies of the strong impression which those afflictions made on my mind, by devoting myself sincerely to the duties of religion.

#### DEPOSITION OF JOHN VIAL

I, JOHN VIAL, of North Providence, in the county of Providence, in the State of Rhode Island, on oath certify and say that sometime in the latter part of November or the beginning of December, A. D. 1775, I entered as Gunner's Mate on board the *Washington*, a public armed vessel in the service of the United States and under the command of S. Martindale, Esq. Said vessel was sent out by order of General Washington, from Plymouth, Mass., to cruize in Boston harbour to intercept supplies going to Boston, then in the possession of the British troops. After we had been out a short time we were captured by a British twenty-gun ship called the *Foy* and were carried to Boston, where we re-

mained about a week, and were then put on board the frigate *Tartar*, and sent to England as prisoners.

And I, the said John, further testify and say that I well remember Israel R. Potter, now residing in Cranston, who was a mariner on board the *Washington* also. Said Potter entered about the time I did, and was captured and carried to England with me. We arrived in England in January, 1776; we were then put into the hospital—the greater part of the crew being sick in consequence of the confinement during the voyage—where many died. I remained in imprisonment about sixteen months, when I made my escape. What became of said Potter afterwards I do not know, but I have not the least doubt he remained a prisoner until the peace—1783—as he stated in his application for a pension. I have no doubt he suffered a great deal during his captivity. According to my best recollection, nearly one-third of the crew died in the hospital. I do remember an affair which took place during our voyage to England which caused Potter to suffer a great deal more than perhaps he otherwise would: A number of the crew of the *Washington* formed a plan to rise and take the frigate, but were defeated in their purpose, among whom I believe Potter was one, and in consequence [was] put in irons for the remaining part of the voyage, with a number of others. And I, the said John, do further testify that I do not know of any of the said crew of the *Washington* now being alive, except said Potter and myself; and that I do not believe it to be in the power of said Potter to procure any other testimony of the above-mentioned facts except mine.

JOHN VIAL

Rhode Island District—Providence, Aug. 6, 1823.

The said John Vial, who is well-known to me and is a creditable witness, made solemn oath to the truth of the foregoing deposition by him subscribed in my presence.

DAVID HOWELL,  
DISTRICT JUDGE.

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